



Public Engagement with Research at the University of Leeds 2023-24



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Introduction

We are pleased to share our first annual report on Public Engagement with Research (PEWR), highlighting the University of Leeds commitment to ensuring that research contributes meaningfully to society.

Public engagement is a vital part of a healthy research ecosystem. It enables researchers to work collaboratively with communities, stakeholders, and citizens—ensuring that research is informed by diverse perspectives and aligned with public priorities. This approach strengthens the relevance and impact of research, builds public trust, and supports evidence-based policy and innovation.

The report showcases the breadth of engagement activity across our institution and reflects our strategic focus on openness, inclusion, and shared learning. We believe that research should be shaped through dialogue and partnership, helping to address complex societal challenges with insight, accountability, and purpose.

Leeds, July 2025

Dr Alexa Ruppertsberg
Head of Public Engagement with Research
Research and Innovation Service
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Institutional Level

We believe that research works best when researchers and communities learn from each other, work together, and share ideas. This helps to make sure the research matters and benefits everyone.

At the University of Leeds, we uphold the definition for Public Engagement with Research from the national body for Public Engagement, the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement with Research (NCCPE):

“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’s definition of Public Engagement:

www.publicengagement.ac.uk/introducing-public-engagement



Public engagement with Research is essential for cultivating an inclusive and engaged research culture and it is part of **Open Research**. It enables the creation of a responsive, accountable research system that builds and sustains trust with society and government. Public and community engagement with Research drives ethical engagement, trust building, sustainable relationships, includes more knowledge holders, and aligns with the openness and inclusivity now expected by the REF. It is also a critical part of the civic agenda and supports it by fostering trust, enabling collaboration, and driving systemic change, helping to transform civic missions from statements of intent into purposeful action.

As a signatory to the **NCCPE Manifesto for Public Engagement** in 2015 and 2018, we embrace a collaborative approach to research. Public engagement connects researchers and the public to share insights, co-create activities, and make research accessible. This ensures it is relevant and beneficial to all involved.

At the University of Leeds, we have embedded systematic tracking and visibility of public engagement activities by creating a dedicated repository within Symplectic eight years ago. This improved the institution’s ability for statutory reporting on engagement for HE-BCI returns and it integrates with REF-supporting systems, strengthening the University’s accountability, transparency and strategic planning.

The University of Leeds also recognises the status of public engagement as part of academic promotion criteria. Since 2016, ‘Public Engagement and Outreach’ are included in the University’s academic promotion criteria across all three academic pathways—Research, Student Education, and Leadership. This demonstrates the status of public engagement and outreach within academic careers and contributes to embedding it as a recognised and rewarded component of research culture.

- In 2023-24, 79 applicants used the PE and outreach criterion successfully in their academic promotion application out of 226 (35% criterion use).
- 35 for Grade 8 (44%); 26 for Grade 9 (33%) and 18 for Grade 10 (23%).
- 49 in Research pathway (62%), 27 in Student Education pathway (34%) and 6 in Leadership pathway (8%).

Notable projects and grants

STEM Ambassadors

STEM Ambassadors are volunteers who bring real-world experience in science, technology, engineering, and maths into schools and communities to inspire young people. They help make STEM subjects engaging and accessible, supporting learning and challenging stereotypes.

The University of Leeds currently has **49 registered STEM Ambassadors** who contribute their time to enrich education and promote STEM opportunities. The programme is delivered by STEM Learning and supported by UK Research and Innovation.

RAE Ingenious award

Innovative research from the University of Leeds that reimagines engineering and challenges traditional stereotypes made its world premiere in the heart of the city. The *Mechanics of Life*, unveiled on the big screen at the Everyman Theatre in Trinity Leeds, marked the culmination of a ten-month collaboration between the University, [Northern Ballet](#), and Batley Girls' High School. Funded by the [Royal Academy of Engineering's Ingenious grant](#), the project was led by **Dr Briony Thomas from the School of Mechanical Engineering**, a former Engagement Excellence Fellow. By uniting engineers with the creative talents of Northern Ballet, the initiative aimed to shift perceptions of engineering by exploring the mechanics of movement through dance—introducing new and diverse audiences to the discipline and forging lasting connections between the arts and sciences.

News article: [The Mechanics of Life](#) | News article: [RAE Ingenious award](#)

Moon Palace as part of Leeds2023

Moon Palace is a travelling astronomy observatory and artwork, creatively housed in a converted school bus. It was a featured project in the LEEDS 2023 Year of Cultural Celebrations. The scientific components of Moon Palace were developed under the leadership of **Erin McNeil, Physics Outreach Officer in the School of Physics and Astronomy**. Working in collaboration with the East Leeds Project and drawing on their strong community relationships, Erin together with **Professor Melvin Hoare** and **Dr John Ilee** engaged 10 students from the School to help shape a public engagement programme. Solomon Appekey, a recent master's student, was responsible for most of the technical work on the project. This initiative leveraged the School's expertise in radio astronomy and public engagement. Through the collaboration with East Street Project, it was grounded in place-based practice and cultural inclusion, which over 3,000 participants were able to enjoy.

Building on the success of Moon Palace, Erin McNeil secured additional funding from the Ogden Trust. She is collaborating with Durham, Hertfordshire, and Queen Mary University of London to develop a new capacity-building model for researchers. This model blends creative methods with equity-focused science communication, aiming to grow a confident, community-facing cohort of science communicators.

[BBC article](#) | [Internal news article](#)



Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition 2024

[Nanoscale Advanced Materials Engineering \(NAME\)](#) participated in the Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition 2024. The exhibit, titled “**Engineering atom-by-atom**”, was a collaboration between the University of Leeds, the University of Manchester, and University College London. It showcased research on creating and measuring ultra-thin materials with unique electronic properties, which have potential applications in quantum computing and advanced electronics.

Dr Philippa Shepley from the School of Physics and Astronomy, a former Engagement Excellence Fellow, led the public engagement strategy for the NAME project. The exhibit included interactive elements such as a 3D LED display simulating ion implantation—a technique used to insert single atoms into materials to alter their properties. The goal is to help visitors of all ages visualize and engage with nanoscale science in an accessible and memorable way.

The project was supported by the PE team and was one of only 14 selected for this prestigious event, highlighting its scientific and public engagement excellence.

[Internal news article](#)

Link collection for corroborating evidence in this section:

[NCCPE’s definition for PE, adopted by Leeds](#)
[Open Research Statement for Leeds](#)
[Manifesto link for Leeds](#)
[University Strategy](#)





The PE Team

The Public Engagement with Research team (PE team) comprises three FTE staff: a Head of Public Engagement, a Public Engagement Officer, and a Digital Creative Officer. The team is part of the Knowledge Exchange and Impact Directorate in the central Research and Innovation Service.

This core team provides year-round, institution-wide support to embed high-quality public engagement with research activity. This directly supports and delivers part of the [University's Research and Innovation Strategy](#), by aiming to increase societal impact, foster collaboration, and ensure research is inclusive, responsive, and relevant.

The PE Team offers an essential model of sustained support that enables consistent capacity-building, long-term relationships with researchers and external partners, and deep institutional embedding of engagement practice. Over nine years, this sustained presence has translated into institutional strength and strategic advantage. The team's expertise, refined over time, has made them a trusted source of guidance and innovation. Beyond the operational role, the PE Team serves as a cultural anchor by modelling the institution's values, mentor new colleagues, and help embed engagement as a core part of the institution's identity.

The PE team is dedicated to making research accessible, relevant and impactful for all. We support and guide researchers through every step of engagement, from training, to idea development, delivery, and evaluation.

The team's projects reflect a strong commitment to advancing research, fostering inclusive public engagement, and strengthening cross-sector collaboration. Through training, mentorship, and hands-on opportunities, we support the development of researchers and PhD students while supporting communities to play an active role in the research process. These initiatives promote equity, bridge engagement gaps, and reinforce our dedication to collaborative and socially responsive research. The work exemplifies a strong commitment to partnership-driven public engagement to bring campus and community together in tangible and meaningful ways. These achievements, supported by a focus on ethical practice and strategic alignment, demonstrate how partnerships amplify public engagement and build sustained, impactful relationships.

In 2023-24, the PE team...

- supported 17 researcher-led projects through strategic internal funding schemes, including participatory and co-produced research.
- embedded evaluation and reflective practice using the FailSpace approach to support shared learning.
- expanded the training programme by establishing a new Associate and Fellowship scheme that provides mentoring, professional development, and capacity-building opportunities for researchers and PhD students (7 Fellows and 81 Associates).
- delivered 22 cross-disciplinary training sessions to build skills in public engagement and research communication.
- collaborated with national and institutional partners to produce creative outputs that celebrate and share research.
- designed and delivered practical engagement tools and visual materials to enhance institutional culture and visibility (10 research videos, 9 maker kits, 6 design projects).
- delivered high-profile public events to connect research with diverse audiences, including children, families, and community partners (7500 visitors).
- built strong partnerships with civic and third-sector organisations through co-designed engagement initiatives (LCC-Child Friendly Leeds, Zero Waste Leeds).
- contributed to institutional strategy through public engagement planning and visibility efforts.





Connectivity and facilitating dialogue

Be Curious

May 2024 saw another vibrant, buzzing and stimulating Be Curious on campus. Be Curious is the annual University of Leeds flagship public engagement event, designed to open our campus and research to the people of Leeds and the wider region for a day of exploration, discovery and conversation. It was the most successful to date, welcoming 2,000 visitors onto campus. This was a significant increase of 25% from 1,600 in 2023, despite introducing a booking process. The event featured 35 interactive stalls from across six faculties and three services, alongside contributions from external partners such as Moon Palace, Leeds Piano Competition, and St John Ambulance. Highlights included storytelling sessions, youth curated spaces, and support from Child Friendly Leeds (Leeds City Council).

This year, we prioritised visitor experience by expanding the event's footprint; improving accessibility; and creating a more welcoming campus atmosphere. A major success was the introduction of the quiet hour and single level access, enabling more families, including those with additional needs, to enjoy the event.

Through targeted communications and community engagement, we welcomed a large number of first-time visitors (57% of attendees). The event also saw an encouraging rise in teenage attendees and broad geographic participation, with over 25% of attendees travelling from Leeds postcodes of [social grades](#) C1, C2, D and E; and 20% of attendees travelling from outside of Leeds.

Visitor feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with attendees praising the event's educational value, welcoming atmosphere, and inclusivity. Free entry, hands-on activities, and the opportunity to experience university life were especially appreciated. Many visitors stayed longer than planned, a clear sign of the event's strong engagement. Children expressed genuine enthusiasm for the subjects showcased, and creative feedback boards captured both what they learned, and the aspirations sparked by the day.

All stalls at Be Curious were delivered by researchers who had completed public engagement training through the new Public Engagement Associates and Fellowship scheme. This investment in training was evident: visitors consistently noted the researchers' ability to communicate effectively and pitch content at the right level. Researchers themselves reported meaningful personal and professional growth, highlighting increased confidence, improved communication skills, and a deeper connection to public engagement.

[Internal news article : Be Curious](#)



Smeaton300 x Leeds2023

As part of the University's Smeaton300 celebration the PE team have worked with the Cultural Institute, Leeds Industrial Museum and Leeds Libraries to bring the legacy of Leeds-born and father of civil engineering John Smeaton to life in a hands-on way.

This included the first ever off-campus Be Curious event, hosted at Leeds Industrial Museum – a former wool mill - during February half-term, where 250 visitors engaged with seven research-led stalls relating to John Smeaton's legacy and a storytelling session based on the co-produced children's book "Cass & Cotton Boll". The book tells the story of current cotton and clothes production and was developed as part of the AHRC-funded project '[Cotton's Hidden Stories](#)' led by Dr Mark Sumner. The PE team had facilitated and supported the production and delivery of the book together with Mark and Bethan Bide and a professional writer.

To broaden the impact of the research, the PE team co-developed maker kits in collaboration with researchers from the Schools of Music, Psychology, History, Civil Engineering, Leeds Institute of Clinical Trials Research, Mechanical Engineering, and Chemical and Process Engineering. These maker kits, designed for use at home with everyday materials, made complex research topics more accessible and engaging.

The experience highlighted how maker kits can extend research beyond traditional settings, encouraging take-home, research-inspired learning. The kits were well-received by visitors and offered researchers a new model for public engagement. They also helped connect the research to the overarching theme of John Smeaton, while offering reusable, adaptable tools for future outreach.

To deliver on Be Curious' offer that access is free, we covered the museum's entry fee for the day. This not only helped with access to the hands-on research activities, but also opened up the opportunity for visitors to engage with a cultural space that had previously been inaccessible to them.

Smeaton300 allowed us to bring engineering and interdisciplinary research into accessible spaces at the heart of the community, reinforcing our commitment to making research relevant in people's lives.

We also had a dedicated Smeaton300 area at Be Curious in May, efficiently reusing the activities and interactive storytelling from the Leeds Industrial Museum event, while reaching a wider audience and increasing engagement with the activity.

[Smeaton300 report](#) | [Smeaton300 Celebrations](#)

Research Journeys x 100 Black Women Professors Now

We worked with eight members of the [100 Black Women Professors Now](#) initiative in collaboration with Dr Kendi Guantai and the EDI team. By championing diversity, inclusion, and the remarkable achievements of black women in academia, we can inspire a brighter future for research and beyond. The initiative features the voices of black female academics at the University and is our second series of Research Journeys, which captures the unique stories to research via storytelling. Storytelling is one of the human race's greatest and most valuable skills. Stories build empathy and capture the imagination. They do not just change the way we think – they powerfully shape and change the way that we behave. Spanning themes from the future of healthcare to decolonisation, this series of Research Journeys explores pioneering work and celebrates its impact in academia.

The series launched on International Women's Day (8th March) and was supported by the social media team and the internal communications team, helping to promote the videos.

With over 1,500 views and growing, our videos continue to resonate—proof that meaningful content can inspire across time and reach hearts well beyond the moment it's shared.

[Research Journeys x 100 Black Women Professors Now](#)



VOICE platform launch for patient and public involvement



As part of the national Voice platform, our institution is proudly positioned under 'Research@Leeds' (<https://voice-global.org/collaborators/research-at-leeds>), offering researchers across the University of Leeds, NIHR centres, and the Clinical Research Facility a powerful tool to involve the public meaningfully in research.

With a diverse national network of over 8,000 members, Voice allows researchers to engage people with lived experience through a range of involvement opportunities—workshops, surveys, events, and panels. This platform supports co-design, co-production, and co-development by connecting research teams with individuals whose insights and experience can shape research from the outset.

Beyond national reach, Voice supports embedding research into local communities, helping champion work that addresses and helps reduce health inequalities. By opening up research to wider participation, Voice ensures that projects are not only more inclusive but also more relevant, impactful, and ethically grounded.

The platform has proven to be a valuable tool for supporting research projects, with users highlighting its ease of use, quick turnaround, and effective system notifications. It has been especially helpful for streamlining participant recruitment. In our first year of use in 2023/24, 35 researchers registered on the platform from six faculties and NIHR. Six projects were featured, reflecting its growing role in facilitating efficient and accessible research engagement.



Ethical partnership working/building trust

Partnership with Child Friendly Leeds

Over the past year, we have deepened the University's partnership with Child Friendly Leeds (CFL), supporting the city's ambition to be the best place for children and young people to grow up. As a proud CFL Ambassador, we have championed accessible, meaningful opportunities for young people to engage and connect with research and creativity.

This partnership is grounded in shared values, particularly the 12 Wishes. We are working to embed these wishes into the University's activities by encouraging researchers to align their work with the priorities of young people in Leeds. Through a range of collaborative activities, we champion creativity, learning, sustainability, and community connection as part of our civic mission.

In 2023–24, this partnership was reflected in a series of joint initiatives that promoted creativity, learning, sustainability, and community connection—core to our civic mission.

In August, we supported Breeze's celebration of [National Play Day](#) on Millenium Square in the heart of the city, with university researchers engaging around 250 families through hands-on activities that demonstrated how research can positively impact people's lives.

Our commitment extended to seasonal giving, as we joined forces with the Sustainability Service and Leeds University Union to run the [Winter Coat and Christmas Gift appeal](#), supporting Zero Waste Leeds, another CFL Ambassador. We contributed to the total collection of over 7600 winter clothing items and to saving over 111 tonnes of CO2. The initiative helped hundreds of families across the city, reinforcing the university's dedication to social and environmental impact.

We also proudly supported and presented the Inspiring Creativity Award at the [Child Friendly Leeds Awards 2024](#) in July. Our team helped celebrate the achievements of young people and organisations across Leeds and shared the value of university-community partnerships with civic stakeholders.

These activities reflect our belief that meaningful engagement with children and young people is integral to our role as a civic university. Through Child Friendly Leeds, we are building a stronger, more inclusive city—one partnership at a time.

Primary School network launch

Over the past year, the PE team has taken a co-lead in coordinating the University's engagement with primary schools. This work responds to the need for a clear, central point of contact to prevent schools from being overwhelmed by uncoordinated offers or unintentionally excluded.

In collaboration with Student Volunteering, the team is developing the Primary School Network and contributing to a new cross-service working group on pre-16 engagement, alongside Widening Participation and Educational Engagement. This joint effort aims to create a more equitable, strategic approach to school engagement and reduce duplication.

A key output has been the launch of a quarterly newsletter, now reaching 196 primary schools across Leeds. It shares a curated selection of opportunities, making it easier for schools to engage and helping University colleagues coordinate outreach more effectively. Two programmes have already filled as a direct result.

Leeds Bear Hunt

During summer 2023, Leeds Hospitals Charity and Leeds Children's Hospital transformed Leeds City Centre with an interactive trail of 35 bears inspired by Michael Rosen's iconic children's book, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. In the spirit of the book, the public could join the bear hunt, ticking off as many bears as possible around the city of Leeds.

The University of Leeds hosted Spectrum Bear - designed by artist Christine Jopling - **on campus** under the trees near NEXUS. Led by the Public Engagement with Research team, the installation featured a QR code linking to public-facing campus activities, including trails, galleries, and research animations. An estimated 5,000 visitors came to campus as a result, highlighting the value of participating in city-wide initiatives to welcome family audiences, share our research, and strengthen the University's role as a local anchor institution.



Engagement and participation

Be Curious Associates and Fellowship scheme

In 2023 - 2024 we launched the Public Engagement Associates and Fellowship (PEAF) programme as a key initiative designed to build capacity and confidence among researchers in engaging the public with their work. It supports researchers in developing the skills needed to communicate their research in accessible, relevant, and creative ways.

In its first year, the scheme welcomed **81 Associates** and **7 Fellows** from across the University.

The **Associates scheme** offered a structured series of sessions designed to build confidence and skills in sharing research with public audiences. Participants explored a range of engagement methods, recognising that different approaches suit different types of research and audiences. Associates received priority access to public engagement opportunities, including the annual Be Curious event, and ongoing support from the PE team. Once accepted, Associates retained lifetime membership and were invited to attend future sessions.

The **Fellowship** builds on seven years' experience of the Engagement Excellence Scheme and is an extension of the Associates scheme, providing a more intensive experience for six researchers. Fellows received **£1,000** to support their public engagement activities, participated in extended learning sessions with guest speakers, and benefited from at least **12 hours of one-to-one mentoring**. They also took part in field visits to observe public engagement practices at leading institutions (e.g., Wellcome Collection, British Museum and the British Library), gaining valuable insights and inspiration for their own work.

Many participants highlighted the supportive environment and the opportunity to connect with colleagues from across disciplines as key strengths of the programme.

The PEAF programme helped foster a growing community of confident public engagers who are now contributing to a culture of engagement across faculties. This community is not only enhancing the visibility and relevance of research but also strengthening the University's capacity to meet its strategic goals around civic engagement, research impact, and inclusive research culture.

By equipping researchers at all career stages with the tools and networks to share their work meaningfully, the programme has laid the groundwork for long-term change in how public engagement is understood and practiced across the institution.



Workshop programme as part of Engaged Research

In 2023–24, the PE team continued its long-standing commitment to engaged research through the **Pepnet** series—regular seminars and workshops that have been running for over a decade. These sessions provided a vital space for researchers, professional staff, and academics to come together and explore the evolving landscape of public and community engagement.

Pepnet sessions were closely linked to the Engaged Research Microsoft Team, which has grown into a vibrant community of over 1,400 members. This connection helped ensure that learning and discussion extended beyond the sessions themselves, fostering a wider culture of collaboration and shared practice.

Topics covered during the eight workshops this year included practical tools such as Ripple Effects Mapping, strategies for evaluating engagement, and a three-part Researching with Communities workshop series. Sessions were typically held in person over lunchtime, creating an informal yet focused environment for cross-disciplinary exchange.

Participatory Research support report

In spring 2024, we commissioned a consultant to evaluate how the University of Leeds can best support the future of participatory research. This work built on two earlier workshops on researching with communities, as well as a rapid review that synthesised community-identified barriers to participation in research—developed to complement an internal report on academic barriers.

The resulting report assessed our institutional support for participatory research, drawing on interviews with academic and professional services colleagues, a review of current policies and resources, and examples of best practice from peer institutions. It also connects with our broader work on Open Research by informing the development of a shared resource and training hub.

One key finding is the alignment of priorities between researchers and communities, which provides a strong foundation for collaboration. The review identifies opportunities to strengthen support through better coordination, more consistent sharing of good practice, and streamlined processes. These enhancements would improve the experience for all partners, build capacity for larger funding bids, and enable more equitable, impactful research. Importantly, many of these improvements can be made with relatively modest investment—ensuring participatory research at Leeds continues to grow in quality, scope, and accessibility.



Research Development Fund

The 2023 – 2024 academic year marked the final round of the Research Development Fund (RDF), designed to support researchers to engage with publics for shaping research proposals. This year saw a rise in demand, with 17 applications submitted up from 10 the previous year, indicating renewed interest in early-stage engagement support. Of these 16 were successful and only one unsuccessful, who was supported to find a more appropriate fund for their work.

We awarded £8,600 to researchers across a range of disciplines; the Faculty of Medicine and Health submitting most applications. This reflects the fund's strategic value, particularly in filling the gap left by the closure of the Research Design Service. So far, nine projects have been completed and seven more are due to finish in 2024 – 2025

The RDF has proven to be a successful catalyst for future funding application. Projects supported this year have helped secure over £2.5 million in external grants.

As the fund concludes, it leaves behind a strong legacy of enabling impactful public and community-driven research proposals. The Public Engagement team will continue to support this work through mentoring, training and consultation.

Participatory Research Fund and FailSpace evaluation

The PE team co-developed the final guidance for the 2023/24 Participatory Research Fund (PRF) call with members of several relevant research networks, and Research and Innovation Services colleagues. The resulting guidance and application form are intentionally flexible, with minimal criteria and structured questions to accommodate the varied nature of participatory research, including research projects and case studies. With 14 applications, the fund was 3 times oversubscribed in terms of funding and the panel agreed to [fund six projects](#).

Because the call had significantly changed from previous iterations, we invited awardees to a shared experiment regarding evaluation. To move away from evaluation as a last-minute exercise that simply ticks boxes for a funder to a more integrated learning process, we used Failspace, which has been developed by Professor Leila Jancovich and is shared via the Centre for Cultural Value. Failspace is an approach that promotes the benefits of acknowledging failure alongside success to enhance critical reflection and is proving to be a game-changer in how evaluation is addressed. Via externally facilitated sessions throughout the year, awardees were introduced to and continually supported to implement the approach in their disciplines, outside the cultural sector for which the approach originally had been developed. Our aim was to introduce the concept into people's practice and contribute to their professional practice of differentiated evaluation.

The **FailSpace** approach proved highly effective as a planning tool, offering critical granularity, challenging assumptions, identifying risks, and instilling confidence at the outset of projects. However, discussions about failure initially evoked discomfort and fear. Over time, the safe peer group environment fostered greater honesty and highlighted the value of reflecting on failure, reinforcing the importance of a secure space for such dialogue.

Participation in an interdisciplinary cohort practicing participatory research methods was a transformative experience. It built confidence, fostered a sense of belonging to a broader participatory research community, and created a supportive environment for open discussions about failure, stimulating thought, learning, and collaboration.

The FailSpace framework proved both versatile and accessible, applicable across diverse disciplines and project types. Researchers recognised its value and expressed interest in adopting it for future reflection and engagement with participants and partners.

Leadership/evaluating engagement and impact

Development of Be Curious brand identity and strategic plan for PE

Be Curious is the public-facing brand of Public Engagement with Research at the University of Leeds. It is not only a platform for engaging the public but also a dynamic space where researchers can develop their skills, collaborate with peers, and share their work with a wide audience.

Since its inception in 2016, Be Curious has grown from a single annual event into a diverse portfolio of exciting, innovative initiatives. These initiatives are designed to showcase the University's societal impact, foster trust between the institution and the public, and highlight the valuable contributions of our researchers. To date, we have published children's books, delivered bespoke training programmes, created engaging video content; research focussed maker kits and led public engagement activities across our local and regional communities.

As our brand continues to grow, the Public Engagement team recognised the need to refine our brand voice, public offerings and our visual identity to better reflect the evolving needs of our audiences and academic stakeholders.

In 2023, we began a journey of brand discovery with Magpie, an external creative agency engaging in activities that challenged us to think creatively about what Be Curious is and what it represents.

With an initial framework in place, we tested our new brand voice with a focus group of Leeds-based community leaders and public audiences. Their feedback helped shape our final brand voice, ensuring it resonates with diverse communities while reflecting the scope and impact of our work. This process resulted in a brand voice that authentically communicates our mission and addresses the needs of the public.

Based on our brand identity work, we commissioned another external agency, ThreeTenSeven, to translate our new brand identity into a visual identity, to be launched in the next academic year in anticipation of Be Curious Live's 2025 edition.

During 2023-24, alongside our brand refresh, we have undertaken significant development work to prepare the Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan for 2024-27. This process involved close collaboration within the team and the use of the NCCPE's EDGE tool to help assess our current practice, identify priorities, and guide future activity. The emerging strategy not only reflects our institutional values but also positions us to align more closely with key external frameworks such as the KEF, REF, and the NCCPE Watermark and will be launched in the next academic year after further consultation with stakeholders.



Community Engagement

CENTRE – the Community Engagement Network across teaching, research and civic engagement – is an inclusive, transdisciplinary internal network at the University of Leeds that connects with external communities to promote ethical and impactful community engagement across education, research, and civic initiatives. It was founded in May 2023 and its mission is to ensure that all university activities involving community interaction uphold consistently high ethical standards, enabling the institution to effectively address local challenges and inequalities within the city, the region, and beyond.

Through close alignment and collaboration with CENTRE, the PE team has advanced a shared commitment to ethical, inclusive community engagement across the University. By leading CENTRE's research stream, contributing significantly to the development of the Leeds Community Research Network (CRN) bid, and facilitating workshops and strategic reviews, the PE team has worked to embed consistent, values-driven practices across institutional functions. This has helped connect participatory research, open research principles, and community engagement into a cohesive framework, reinforcing CENTRE's mission to foster a culture of ethical engagement that is integrated, collaborative, and responsive to community needs.

National Festivals: Being Human

In November 2023, we supported the University's contribution to the national Being Human Festival, in collaboration with the Cultural Institute and LAHRI. We delivered a vibrant programme of humanities-focused activities on a modest budget, showcasing the depth and creativity of our local research and community partnerships. However, the experience also highlighted the value of a more locally led approach. National frameworks can sometimes overlook the specific needs and rhythms of community partners, and we believe that future efforts would benefit from a more sensitive, place-based model that prioritises local collaboration and tailored promotion. This presents an opportunity to develop a more sustainable and community-focused programme of humanities engagement in Leeds.



Public Engagement with Research at the University of Leeds 2023-24

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Alexa I. Ruppertsberg, Andy Guy, Celine Roblin-Robson (2025),
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