

Engage with Strathclyde: An innovative approach to knowledge exchange

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Abstract

This paper describes how the University of Strathclyde has initiated a successful programme of events, taking place annually over one week, with the aim of enhancing partnerships with industry, government and the third sector. It focuses on the support provided to enable events from the University's four faculties to take place, and how an innovative approach to encouraging busy academics to participate has led to, not only successful individual events during the week, but successful partnerships going forward.

1. Introduction

The idea of universities increasing their engagement with external partners is not new. Indeed many reports, from government and other sources have sought to stimulate policy and guidance aiming to encourage collaborative partnerships. Since the Lambert Report¹, published by HM Treasury in 2003, and the Wilson Review of Business and University Collaborations (2012)², to more recently in 2013, Sir Andrew Witty's 'independent review of the role universities can play in supporting growth'³, there is a clear focus for universities to increase their interactions with businesses and organisations. Specifically, the Witty Report identifies, amongst others, that:

- *Universities can play a stronger role in realising the economic benefits of research insights for localities and the Industrial Strategy; and that*
- *Collaboration is essential.*

Funding to encourage working with external partners has supported these reports in the form of Technology Strategy Board funding and in Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council's Knowledge Transfer Grant, and Innovation Voucher schemes. The Scottish Government also recognises the importance of business and university collaborations and has as one of their national indicators to: '*improve knowledge exchange from university research*'⁴.

1.1 Strategic fit

The University of Strathclyde has always maintained important relationships with businesses and organisations on a global, national and local scale, and continues to seek to improve and escalate these relationships. Evidence of this is the development of several initiatives, including: the [Advanced Forming Research Centre⁵](#); the [Power Networks Demonstration Centre⁶](#); and due to open later in 2014, the [Technology and Innovation Centre⁷](#).

The University's reputation for innovative initiatives to support knowledge exchange in particular in working with external partners is evidenced by recent awards, such as the Times Higher Education (THE) University of the Year in 2012/13; and THE Entrepreneurial University of the Year 2013/14.

The University of Strathclyde has a strategy which includes 'exemplary knowledge exchange and impact' as one of five strategic themes. In order to continue achievements in knowledge exchange, the strategy details objectives as 'effective industry engagement' and 'effective knowledge exchange with government and public services', and seeks to monitor this through performance measures with growth targets for the University in a variety of knowledge exchange mechanisms including KTPs, licensing, consultancy, CPD, and commercialisation and enterprise.

It is this strategy which legitimises the development of the programme of events which is known as 'Engage with Strathclyde' and which underpins the fundamental aim of the project which is to: 'celebrate and strengthen the engagement we have with outside organisations, and use that opportunity to identify and attract new external parties to partner with members of staff and students, to enhance our reach and scope of collaborative and consultative relationships.'

Engage with Strathclyde was created from a vision, to encourage more staff to consider opportunities in KE, encourage those already conducting KE to escalate existing relationships, or identify new opportunities in terms of audiences and partners.

The project team brought together to deliver on this vision quickly created an innovative approach and system to what is essentially a programme of events, and have maintained a clear focus throughout on the objectives for each event and ensuring that the ethos of creating partnerships is not obscured.

1.2 Engage with Strathclyde: How it Evolved

Engage with Strathclyde aims to build on the success of large 'expo' type events, often held in external venues, and which the University organised and promoted, offering a mix of exhibition and talks to a wide range of audiences. Feedback from those events identified that the mix of topics presented led to less specificity and therefore a mixed audience. Whilst these large events were useful to promote the

University generally, there was less no direct feedback that they led to collaborative partnerships, and hence were a good return on investment.

In addition large events in external venues incurred significant costs. By holding events on campus, there was more scope to spend this type of budget in the University's internal economy. This is another important innovative feature of the Engage with Strathclyde ethos to be creative about the budget and how it is allocated, ensuring close links with both internal and external suppliers. For example, rates were negotiated with catering suppliers who were to receive a substantial amount of business during the week.

In order to address the relative disadvantages of the external, non-specific events, the team revitalised the approach to events and took the opportunity to showcase the University in terms of its facilities, capabilities and city centre location. The programme which has developed offers niche events for specific audiences over one week.

Complementary to the traditional approach of seed funding new KE projects, Engage with Strathclyde offers a greater opportunity for return on investment, facilitating more opportunities to collaborate with a lower financial commitment up front.

1.3 Engage with Strathclyde: Two Perspectives

Engage with Strathclyde can be viewed from several perspectives: one is an internal process for running events; and another from the external point of view of a week when the University showcases a range of facilities, research, knowledge exchange and above all else, a willingness to create collaborative opportunities.

Furthermore, for an individual from an external organisation, the University opens its doors to the world that week. It offers a programme of niche events that have been thoughtfully arranged and programmed to entice an individual away from their workplace for a period of time, and places events of similar interest at complementary times to encourage visitors to consider attending a sequence of events.

In addition, there are other more general interest events such as exhibitions and facility tours that have wide appeal. The overall message is that of a coherent thoughtful programme of activity which can help a business or organisation see how they could benefit from collaboration with the right researcher, research team or facility manager to help develop their own area of work.

From an internal perspective, the project team, although small, recognises that academics and professional services members of staff may not have the time or experience to organise an amazing event. The project team has, therefore, devised a framework for staff which relieves them from the chore of event organisation and provides operational support and a modest budget to assist them to realise their KE objectives.

This support is outlined during a call for proposals stage, eight months prior to delivery. At all stages the team works closely with the Associate Deputy Principal with responsibility for knowledge exchange, and is managed by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Services Directorate. However Engage with Strathclyde is viewed as a successful university initiative and collaborates with a range of professional services teams to ensure effective delivery.

The process involves close co-ordination with faculty management at the Vice Dean KE level, and progress reports delivered to meetings of the University's Knowledge Exchange Group ensure effective governance.

2. Progress to date

The concept of Engage with Strathclyde was initiated in 2012 and resulted in thirty events taking place, which attracted more than 1,500* delegates, over 500* of whom were external partners representing more than 300** organisations from the public, private and third sector. University staff and students were also well represented. However a key learning point was that with a longer lead-in time the effectiveness and management of the process would be enhanced. The launch of the 2013 campaign began three months earlier (in September 2012).

In 2013, with more time and planning, the number of events rose from 30 to 40, and the number of people attending and the profile of the audiences changed significantly:

Table 1: Attendance totals and profile

	2012	2013
No of people attending events	1594	1990
Internal	1009	858
External	509	1029
Other (not known)	74	103
Organisations	313	383

*Does not take into account same person attending two or more different events

** Organisation only counted once over the week

In 2013, the University welcomed over 1,000 delegates* from almost 400** organisations from the public, private and third sector, demonstrating an increase of over 50% and 20% respectively on 2012. The clear objectives and extended planning time was effective in delivering a programme which significantly increased the audience profile, and it is hoped, in the longer term, the results from the external engagement.

3. Outcomes

The project team for Engage with Strathclyde has always been conscious of reporting against the project objective, and also how the project contributes to the wider University strategic aims.

3.1 Event Evaluation

Event evaluation is a priority for Engage with Strathclyde. It offers an insight into whether the expectations of delegates were met, and how likely they are to further engage with the University to develop their work. Engagement with the evaluation process is high and 85% of those completing evaluation forms at the end of events (in 2013) indicated they would be likely to attend another event at the University as part of the Engage with Strathclyde programme, and further, that they would recommend events to their colleagues in future.

Whilst the delegate evaluation of each event is a robust part of capturing feedback regarding their profile, reason for attending, rating of speakers, quality of event, and hygiene factors surrounding it, the project team acknowledges the difficulty in capturing longer term results. Whilst the evidence of new partnerships is at the moment mostly anecdotal, the project team is aware that there have been several key relationships developed through events which have taken place during Engage with Strathclyde. These have resulted in the sponsorship of PhD students, joint research bids, student placements and consultancy work; and in one instance the development of a new centre. The process of formalising how the outcomes resulting from Engage with Strathclyde are captured, are still being reviewed. The event holders themselves are also offered a chance to evaluate the service the project team provides. Ninety six per cent of event holders stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the support they were offered and that their event achieved the aims they set out prior to the event. Ninety two per cent recognised the value of holding their event during the Engage with Strathclyde week instead of at any other time of year. Reasons for doing so included the financial and organisational support provided, potential for cross-marketing with similar events that it raised the profile of their event, and also that delegates benefited from the dynamic atmosphere created during the week.

3.2 Added Value

Whilst the new approach to running events has created enthusiasm in knowledge exchange across the campus, events which might have taken place during the year now align with the dates of Engage with Strathclyde so that they can be seen to be part of a bigger and wide ranging programme.

There have also been a number of unforeseen benefits since Engage with Strathclyde was implemented, including closer working relationships with internal service departments and stakeholders, faculty offices and individual departments. Key examples include the innovative way the project team worked with

stakeholders to implement the framework effectively; for example establishing new ways to work with Catering Services ensure they could deliver the demand placed on their services over the week.

Another area where Engage with Strathclyde has been particularly innovative is in the commissioning of a bespoke website and event booking system with a developer based in an academic department, which could offer the online service required and the provision of more detailed information about an event. The transformation from the basic elementary system utilised in 2012, to the bespoke system created for 2013 combine ease of registration with tailored cross-marketing based on event type and/or events taking place before or after. This enhanced targeting and marketing encouraged delegates to stay on campus and attend an event they had not originally planned. It also allowed for more detailed information about the programme and the speakers at the event to be made available increasing the attractiveness of events to potential audiences.

Additionally, from an event holder's perspective, management of their event was made easier as they could monitor their own registrations and target marketing effort more specifically and appropriately.

3.3 Lessons Learned

The most important lesson learned is in ensuring that individuals who hold events are clear about the ethos and objectives of Engage with Strathclyde, where their responsibilities lie in preparing for and holding a successful event, and how the project team can support them in achieving their aim. Important aspects they need to get right include ensuring they are familiar with the target audience for any event as well as ensuring, particularly for large scale events, that adequate administrative support is available, as often holding events are in addition to an academic's or researcher's workload. In our experience these two factors have a significant impact on the success of an event and indeed whether the event is selected to go ahead.

Successful partnership working with the project team for Engage with Strathclyde to provide support, funding for logistics, and encouragement of the event, ensures event organisers that their event will be successful as possible.

4. Conclusion

Engage with Strathclyde will soon be delivered for the third time (28th April – 2 May 2014). Since the inaugural event in 2012, the project team has witnessed a rise in enthusiasm, participation and engagement internally and externally reflected in the number of attendees, number of events, and outcomes from events. Some event holders now use the framework as an annual mechanism to engage their audience.

The atmosphere on campus during the week creates an air of excitement and a range of staff from all Faculties and Professional Services departments work

together to ensure the smooth running of events, whilst creating a stimulating and engaging professional environment which demonstrates the University is well and truly open for business.

The governance structure ensures this is a University-wide initiative and is only possible through partnership working with all Faculties, and including service departments such as Residence & Catering, Estates Management, Security Services and Marketing and Development Services.

In order to determine if the project is achieving its own aims and how effective it is in contributing to the University's strategy, it certainly contributes towards 'effective knowledge exchange with government and public services', and 'effective industry engagement'. Engage with Strathclyde is not responsible alone for the achievement of university targets for knowledge exchange; however it is part of an innovative strategy to help contribute to them. Through anecdotal evidence, an approximation of the income generated directly, or where an event run during the week has been part of a portfolio of contact with an organisation, has been greater than the budget provided for the entire project.

An important factor going forward for Engage with Strathclyde is to capture more formally, engagements and partnership working which have resulted from interactions during the week, and whether, and how, they contribute to the strategic direction, outlined above.

In summary, the role the Engage with Strathclyde project team plays is reducing the initial barrier academic and research staff face when confronted by the challenge of increasing their KE output.

Appendix 1 Poster created for Praxis Unico Conference 2013

Engage with Strathclyde: enhancing our knowledge exchange

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Events over one week to inform and inspire

www.strath.ac.uk/engage



Why?

- As part of the University's strategy which was implemented to identify new and escalate existing partnerships with businesses and organisations
- Build on previous general 'expo'-type events which targeted non-specific audiences**
- An example of the bold, innovative and imaginative work of the University recognised in the award for THE University of the Year 2012



Facility tours



What?

- One week of specific, tailored events that attracted relevant audiences
- Over 2,600 people registering to attend**
- Over 350 organisations attended
- 40 customised events and 2 exhibitions on campus**
- Style and timetable of events designed for the specific audiences identified



Gallery Exhibitions

How?

- Partnership working between central organising team and individual event organisers in academic and professional services roles to establish event aims and requirements
- Led to one week of specific, tailored events that attracted an appropriate audience**
- Developed infrastructure in IT systems and stakeholder relations to deliver successfully

Benefits?

- New approach created enthusiasm in KE across the campus
- Audience engagement improves outcomes in comparison to non-specific events**
- Has already resulted in new collaborations, extensions and escalations to existing relationships, funded projects and raised the profile of the University's capabilities



Networking



Seminars and discussions



THE AWARDS
UK University of the Year

References

- [1] [Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration](#), HM Treasury, December 2003
- [2] Wilson, T. [Review of Business–University Collaboration, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills](#), (2012)
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- [4] <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/knowledge>
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