



Civic University
Network

Case Study:

Queen Mary University of London's Civic University Agreement Listening Approach



Sarah Gifford, Community Engagement Officer at The Centre for Public Engagement outlines how QMUL placed citizen involvement at the centre of their scoping work.

The Queen Mary Listening Idea

Queen Mary University of London was founded on the principles of engaging local communities in east London, and it was natural for us to reflect this history in the development of our Civic University Agreement. We wanted to create an agreement and commitment to our local place that reflected the opportunities and challenges identified by a variety of stakeholders across east London.

The Centre for Public Engagement (CPE) really wanted to utilise the CUA opportunity for Queen Mary to listen and consult for the first time as an institution far and wide across east London.

The Community Engagement Officer role within the CPE is focussed on community engagement in east London, particularly Tower Hamlets. Seeing this as an opportunity to listen to our residents, community groups, businesses,

This case study was prepared in December 2020. We will update it in late spring 2021, with the results of the listening exercise.

You can access a video of Sarah outlining the approach on the [Civic University Network Members' Area](#).

charities and organisations who Queen Mary already work closely with, as well as those we do not, the CPE began to plan a listening campaign spanning across central and east London boroughs to gather insight.

With the sponsorship of our Vice Principal for Policy and Strategic Partnerships, and support from our Senior Executive team, the CPE planned a proposal for developing Queen Mary's CUA focussed on a large-scale listening campaign across east London..

CUA Phase 1 – Listening Campaign

Who are we listening to?

We are gathering insight from people who live, work and/or study in east London, as well as businesses, charities and community groups.

We have mapped hundreds of community groups and organisations across east London who we would like to gather insight from based on the communities and residents they support or work with, to gather insight from a wide range of interests and backgrounds.

We will be using the local authority borough profiles to map our respondents' age, gender and ethnicity against to ensure the people we listen to are representative of those living in our boroughs.

Where are we listening?

The community listening campaign will span across 7 boroughs in east London: Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Newham, Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham and Redbridge.

We also want to hear from residents and organisations in Westminster, City of London and Islington to incorporate insight from areas surrounding all of Queen Mary's London campuses (Charterhouse Square, West Smithfield and Lincoln's Inn Fields).

How are we listening?

We have developed three listening mechanisms to gather the insight we are hoping for:

1. Working with our local London Citizens organiser, we will be carrying out a series of 1:1 interviews with community leaders and stakeholders including faith leaders,

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- school leadership teams, non-profit organisation leads, housing associations, business owners, local authority staff, MPs and Councillors.
 2. Online focus groups with participants from across east London including interested residents, local campaigners, community groups, businesses and charities, facilitated by London Citizens to ensure they are as objective as they can be.
 3. An online survey.

What insight are we gathering? What are we asking?

The insight we hope to gather and better understand from this listening campaign is centred on:

- The challenges or pressures in the boroughs identified above
- The opportunities in each of those boroughs
- London-wide priorities
- Challenges and opportunities arising specifically from Covid-19
- How Queen Mary University of London could respond

We've framed some questions around eight priority areas that we'll analyse for each borough. These priority areas have been set by researching key themes from each borough plan or local plan in our geographical area of focus.

- Improving the life chances of our children and young people - aspiration, education, opportunities and skills
- Improving health and wellbeing - addressing particular health challenges prevalent in our communities
- Enabling better work futures - skills, training, job growth and employment opportunities
- Future-proofing the environment - sustainability, climate change, air quality
- Developing the creative economy - elevating arts and culture
- Supporting changing communities - ensuring they are safe, secure and inclusive
- Breaking the digital divide - developing better digital access and skills
- Boosting the local economy - local procurement, job creation, growth in existing sectors, new industries, more support for SMEs

What comes after the listening?

Phase 2 – shaping our agreement

We will be holding a number of focus groups in Spring 2021 that will be made up of interested individuals and organisations from the listening campaign in phase 1, other local anchor institutions, internal Queen Mary staff leads and the Senior Executive team. The analysis of the listening campaign will be combined with an internal-facing report undertaken by external consultants, which analyses Queen Mary's local impact. This will form the basis of the focus group discussions, with an aim of identifying key themes and priority areas, based on the needs and opportunities of east London, that will form Queen Mary's agreement.

Phase 3 - Signing and Launch

We hope to sign the agreement and launch this with our communities as co-signatories at a celebration event in the summer of 2021.

Phase 4 – Implementation

Objective setting within the priority areas and planning how to implement our commitments that Queen Mary has based its agreement on will be supported by a steering group of local residents, organisations and anchor institutions, and key Queen Mary teams and senior leadership.

Lessons learned so far

Working with others locally

The CPE identified early on in the listening campaign planning that we wanted to utilise external facilitation support to bring our listening approach to fruition. Queen Mary has been a member of Citizens UK for many years, and we approached our local community organiser to see if this excited them as it did us. We've worked together to incorporate community organising approaches into our listening campaign, and ensure this work connects with other local priorities and campaigns of TELCO (The East London Citizens Organisation).

Local pressures and timing

The CPE has been developing the CUA plans since autumn 2019, and we originally planned to now be at a stage where we were finalising our CUA in Winter 2020, but due to Covid-19 we decided to delay this. Our communities were rightly all consumed with supporting each other

through the first lockdown, and we felt this wasn't the time to ask our residents, organisations and community leaders to think about something beyond Covid-19 when its impacts were being felt so greatly.

We instead moved the east London listening campaign to launch in autumn 2020. We launched this in early November, and this will run up until mid-January 2021. Unfortunately, the beginning of the second national lockdown coincided with our launch week, and undoubtedly this will have challenges for participation. We hope that those who feel that they can work with us will, and for those who this still isn't the right time for can hopefully be involved in phase 2 in spring 2021.

We also feel our communities are at a stage now where organisations and residents want to and need to think and plan for beyond Covid-19 and for a time when Coronavirus isn't taking over our entire lives. Now is a time to be thinking about our neighbourhoods and what people need and want from each other to make positive changes in our communities. We want to gather insight now into how Queen Mary can play an important role in the recovery of east London, as well as working to address the wider societal challenges and inequalities in our boroughs that Covid-19 has enhanced and exacerbated.

Building trust whilst managing expectations

As part of the listening campaign, we will be engaging with new residents, leaders, organisations and businesses who may not have worked with or interacted with Queen Mary before. It is important for us to build trust, and to explain why we are doing this now, and what this work could lead to, to build on these connections to become partnerships in the future.

When gathering insight into ways that Queen Mary could respond to the opportunities and challenges that people identified, it is also important for us to manage expectations. The commitments Queen Mary will make will be formulated at the next phase of the CUA - we may not be the best placed institution to lead on enacting some of the suggestions which is where new partnership working will be needed, and where we are able to make changes internally or commence new activity some of this may be longer-term than an immediate short-term reaction.

Working with others internally

One team within Queen Mary can't form a CUA in isolation. In order for the Agreement to be a liveable commitment, we are bringing other teams within Queen Mary on this journey also. Teams and individuals across Queen Mary – including HR, procurement, sustainability, estates and research will help to shape Queen Mary's commitments and embed them into our work once signed. Senior accountability and leadership are vital for a project like this to have impact both inside and outside of the University, and the VP Policy and Strategic Partnerships and the Senior Executive team are involved in each phase of this work.

As part of our communications plan to reach the many organisations, businesses and individuals we'd like to hear from as part of the insight gathering, we have also had to rely on the teams at Queen Mary who manage institutional-wide relationships with local stakeholders, and the many academics, students and professional services staff who individually manage their own relationships also, to spread the word about the listening opportunity amongst their networks and through their own communication channels.