

Speakers:

GB: Greg Burke, Director – Place & Civic Engagement, Sheffield Hallam University

RC: Richard Calvert, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University

SD: Sophie Duncan, Director – Business & Strategy, National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement

EF: Ed Ferrari, Director of the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University

EM: Emily Morrison, Head of the Institute for Community Studies

PM: Paul Manners, Director - Policy, National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement

Participants/Community

What is the relationship between WS1 and WS2, in particular? Will they be sequential or concurrent? I'm assuming the WS2 learning groups and action teams will be able to start before the WS1 evidence base has been finalised. In which case how will the WS1 evidence get fed into the WS2 activities?

PM: Great question - they will be concurrent, and we are assuming that the action learning groups will be generating lots of questions / requests for evidence that WS1 can help with. NCIA staff will be working across both workstreams - they are not islands!

Who is going to be involved in the panels?

EM: The panels will be multi sector, we are not just relying on academic expertise. We will respect and build on evidence already available. We want representatives from social investment communities, big public private space partnerships. Community representatives people leading volunteer and community sectors, local government to help us understand what the emerging questions are and burning issues in terms of what a university role within places is. From a quality assurance perspective this will challenge us what is good, useful robust evidence. I have been a policy maker, an activist and an academic; I know there are very different doctrines of what 'good' evidence looks like. We need to bring all that in for evidence for the NCIA so that people actually use it, so it doesn't just sit on shelves.

How grassroots will you go with participants?

EM: At the Institute of Community Studies, we work directly with grassroots, increasingly universities are working with constellations of communities. From the evidence programme's perspective, we will be drawing on that evidence to respect it as a source of evidence. We need to manage expectations; we need to be specific and targeted in terms of what questions are universities grappling with. Within work strand three, we want to equip and capacity build with universities so they can connect with grassroots more directly. We will not bypass those local relationships. We want to give tools and resources so that people can ethically and inclusively work with grassroots so that we can create a legacy. We are seeking to shift and strengthen a civic sector.

SD: Workstream two, action teams – each university who will nominate a team to come and work will have a different civic footprint. You may be working closely with grassroot partners, but this may not be the case for everyone. We want to welcome staff and partners from all levels if this makes sense within your university's civic approach. You will need some form of senior sponsorship of this, and we would love to have senior leaders involved. We want to encourage you to think about who would be best to be involved to mobilise change in your location.

How will the NCIA build support and capacity for users in the community at a local level.

GB: There are some interesting examples of universities working with Citizens UK. It is partly around recognising different agencies we can link up with and learn from. Identifying what works and capturing them in a way that we can share this information. We are seeing individual universities doing things that really work and we hope that the NCIA will be able to capture those and disseminate at a local level.

Will student civic activity feature in the research?

EM: Students are a crucial part of the system. We know some universities are doing pioneering partnership work which will benefit young people who are not at the university and pairing students with local young people. They will feature in a very inclusive way.

GB: Civic is very broad, not a small subsection. Students are a huge part of what we do, we need to recognise the huge potential that students have on impacting our place and what they are contributing. The student space is one of interest, we want to capture what is working. We are seeing small scale, from individual departments. Very effective from one academic, but we haven't seen it embedded within the whole university.

Are we focussing on 'our impact (of HEIs)'. Shouldn't we be more concerned about what our constituencies think? However, why would they care?

EF: We welcome these kinds of challenges in the NCIA.

PM: I don't like the title NCIA. We are a learning accelerator, we need to be mindful of the impact of what we do. We are committed as we want to learn and listen. We do not think it is an impact job for us to fix things. I am looking forward to having some interesting times together.

EM: When looking at civic working we need to also look at the impact of the other anchors and community networks and policy impacts. We are the body to look critically at university practice and other organisations and how they play a part in this. We see more bad examples of bad practice where we are not thinking critically about the wider eco systems with the university and the context. We want to raise the profile of those universities who are doing this very successfully.

Policy

A question from John Goddard, what is the difference between evidence of economic impact and the accountability of universities to the local community?

EF: I have a two-part answer

- Within economic impact, we are well versed in this within university sector and areas of society in trying to demonstrate our economic impact. I don't think that is where the NCIA will focus most of its time, as there are lots of tools out there already. There is a critical difference between direct and indirect economic impact. If universities are clear about their direct impact, there are tools to measure that. We need to be thinking about the broader indirect impacts.
- Regarding the accountability, I hope this will run through the NCIA especially in work stream 1. To build on the university commission tenets which encouraged the sector to develop our local civic university agreements. We know that so many universities within the CUN have developed those CUAs. A CUA is important for accountability as that is its civic partners and a university coming together to agree what the university is for and how it delivers benefits and impacts on that place. This will differ from university to university and from place to place. The CUA moves the focus of accountability away from UK PLC (of course they have an important role) and towards Local Authority, local NHS provision, local voluntary sector, to see if they are all working together on shared missions.

Any thoughts around investment zones and potential opportunities there? Any policy areas as early areas for influence and engagement?

EM: We will be looking at scale. Some universities are working on a hyper-local basis, some are working at a borough level, some are forming agreements at city and region level. The investment zones present us with additional geographies that we need to grapple with. In our initial evidence review, which will be rapid, we will be looking at both good and bad practice, what does and doesn't work across those zones. We know that within a university they can be operating a civic strategy at various different levels. We wouldn't be doing justice to the way people are working within the real world if we didn't recognise this. As with innovation districts, it is important to look at the evidence of what works in terms of the university's roles. In regards to policy areas - they are conversant with Levelling Up, in terms of the role of civic universities. We know that universities can contribute well or badly to levelling up. We want our evidence to address policy area. One of our key domains is net zero, it is in the civic universities' framework. We know universities are grappling with this internally and externally. What is the role of a university to support a place to transition to net zero in an inclusive way. We know there are parts of the UK that have stronger evidence, Scotland has delivered a just transition framework. We want to think about how can we improve everyone's practice.

Workstream three has a policy dimension, not only looking at university policy but also key thematic areas of policy.

The skills agenda is important, the integrated care system and the development of a different eco system around health and wellbeing are things we would like to draw out.

RC summarised questions about networking and connecting people.

GB: Workstream three is policy landscapes, one of the posts within this will be building relationships with other networks. This has already started, looking for opportunities.

The aim of impact evidence sounds close to the aims of the REF & TEF is this going to be the CEF?

EF: We don't want that. One of the critical differences between the impact framework as a guiding set of principles for the NCIA and the REF and Tef. It is not about measuring excellence; it is more context specific. We want to see impact and success with what has been agreed locally agreed. We want to know what works in what context and for whom when we are thinking about impact. We want to understand impact as context specific.

The civic university commission was critical of the lack of support central Govt has given to the civic role of universities. Do you expect/ hope that ultimately the NICA's work will help to get this onto Govt's radar more in the future, and what do you think this could look like (in an ideal world!)? Do we think that the NCIA will get this onto the Government radar?

GB: When we started the CUN, we were keen to get gov depts involved but we were unsuccessful. Because we are not being driven by gov targets means that we can set out what we mean by the civic agenda. This means universities can do things based on local need. We do not want a centralised gov framework as this is not closely linked to place. It gives us opportunities as well as difficulties.

Anonymous: More of a reflection than question (and related to question about getting on government's radar). I think it's really important to connect with of our sector mission groups (UUK being the most obvious one) and their existing work around raising the profile of university/civic impact.

For example, UUK's "Britain Thinks" campaign, which looks at perceptions of British public about universities and their role, certainly has some degree of crossover (although a very different approach/evidence model). It can only be mutually beneficial to discuss linkages, timings etc to help avoid unhelpful duplication/confusion of purpose/message etc and build a stronger throughput to government/policy.

John Goddard: Is there a danger that the devolution agenda focused on Mayoral authorities will have an exclusively city region economic agenda and overlook the local and local civil society?

EM: It would be unfair the recent focus on devolution deals. North of Tyne, it is focused on combined authorities. Underneath the deals are a lot of hyperlocal networks, they sit within and adjacent to the deals. I think the weight and power goes to city regions; we don't want that to flow into how we focus our balance. We want focus on areas such as rural areas, areas which cannot attract this kind of devolution deal. What do good partnerships look like, inclusive growth between multi partners to deliver inclusive growth. There are multiple fund and now the devolution deals, people are grappling with new powers, accountability and powers. The role of NCIA is to demonstrate and question what does good partnership look like? We have seen tenders which do not offer a strong enough weigh to universities or anchor institutions to play a role. We need to focus on the doing end and the policy and advocating role.

Civic Definitions

RC summarised questions about how the NCIA will operate within England, UK and the international civic activity.

PM: NCIA is funded by Research England, therefore it is an England only project, but nested within the CUN (which is UK wide). We have to be careful and respectful of our funding. We are working hard to ensure we are opening up our learnings through the Network. We are delighted that we have the connect with the CUN so that we can be open.

RC: We do not want this to be a project that only engages on an England only basis, we really want this to be open and relevant for attendees from the wider UK and beyond.

What's your difference between civic and community engagement?

PM: We did think about this a lot at the start of the CUN, we published a discussion document 'Civic Recipes'. We looked at what different universities are doing and how they are describing their civic work. We categorised 'civic' as encompassing all areas of university activity, therefore community engagement would be part of that repertoire. Civic also includes corporate decisions around procurement, its economic power and its knowledge building practices.

Civic recipes here: <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Civic-Recipes-How-HEIs-are-framing-and-focusing-their-civic-strategies.pdf>

Wider Partners

RC summarised a question about OECD as a partner, how are we going to join the OECD?

EM: OECD are there to help draw in international examples of civic practice and to critically assemble how those are working. This is so that we can bring in inspiring international practice and approaches to learn from these. It will also be to challenge ourselves as EU, USA and AUS have long history of civic engagement. Challenge us to consider what impact means Help strengthen our roots with international partners to strengthen UK partners. NCIA will be a conduit for international civic activity into a wider eco system of civic university system that exists here and elsewhere.