



University of Brighton

Community
University
Partnership
Programme



Learning from On Our Doorsteps

An evaluation of CUPP's Seed Funding Programme between 2010-2012
Professor Stuart Laing, 2016

Foreword

On Our Doorsteps Learning from a Seed Fund Programme 2010-2012

On Our Doorsteps is operated by CUPP (Community University Partnership Programme), the community engagement unit of the University. CUPP has been in place since 2003 and has since then developed and overseen a very wide range of types of community engagement, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. *On Our Doorsteps* was developed as a variant of tried and tested models and introduced in 2010 in order to give particular emphasis to working with the university's immediately neighbouring communities.

The programme is based on three main ideas: being a good neighbour; realising the mutual benefit achievable through community-university partnerships; and focusing on activities within the immediate localities of University of Brighton campus buildings (which are spread across five sites and three coastal towns). Bids were invited annually from partnerships of university staff and community organisations for a sum of £5000 to fund projects which could meet these aims. The bids were considered against six criteria: the

equality of the partnership; the degree of locality; the identification of genuine community need; the realisation of mutual benefit; the likelihood of a longer term partnership being established; and the volunteer opportunities involved.

This process led to six projects being funded in 2010, seven in 2011 and another six in 2012 and there have been four further rounds of seed funding since then, including a separate strand ring-fenced for work in Hastings. However this document summarises the findings from a detailed evaluation of three years of early seed fund activity, and the learning from it that might help shape our future work. It has been organised in three sections: Project outlines, Project achievements, and Systemic issues that have arisen from this work.

Professor Stuart Laing, 2016

Summary and Recommendations

Taken as a whole, the 2010-12 *On Our Doorsteps* programme shows a number of distinctive characteristics.

It operated in neighbourhoods close to all five campuses and made use of a very wide range of subject disciplines. Projects tended to focus on one or more of:

- interactions with immediate benefit to individuals and social groups;
- the production of a plan or report which would enable imminent future benefit;
- significant or culminating participatory events.

Most projects included student activity, most effectively of an 'expert volunteering' type, with strong links to a particular course or academic subject. Most projects also involved research, either as a central aspect of student involvement and/or as subsequent public academic output. Longer term community benefit took place through: continuation of the project activity for new beneficiaries; implementation of the recommendations of the project report or plan; indirect impacts on community partner activity; and the creation of longer term relationships. Longer term benefit to the university was also secured through the continuation of student activity and the development of specific course curricula.

On the basis of these characteristics and of the review as a whole it is possible to make ten recommendations on how any similar programmes might be planned in the future:

- 1 Strong individual project plans might include: university-community interactions; a written outcome; and one or more participatory events.
- 2 Student involvement might be most effectively conceived as a form of 'specialist/expert volunteering' and should be capable of relation to a particular course or subject area.
- 3 A clear plan should be made to deliver a research outcome and the team should include an experienced researcher, even if only in an advisory or mentoring capacity.
- 4 In developing the experience of neighbourliness the nature of the immediate surrounding locality should be carefully considered.
- 5 Post-project relationship management with community partners (whether by project participants or by a specialist unit) should be built into the project plan.
- 6 The great potential for long term curriculum benefit should be recognised and

built into projects from the outset.

- 7 The recognition that a very wide range of academic and professional subjects are suitable for community engagement activity should be widely communicated.
- 8 The diverse roles and identities of individuals likely to be part of such projects should be recognised as a great strength and benefit of this area of activity.
- 9 The continuing need to build, sustain and refresh both internal and external networks of potential participants and partners should be kept in mind.
- 10 Any such programme of activity should expect and encourage continual invention and enterprise.

While summaries of existing best practice will always be of great help they should not be used to deter creative experiment and innovation. No matter how much we can learn from experience University-community engagement is, for the foreseeable future, always likely to involve risk taking, imagination and long term strategic vision.

Immediate Community Benefit

Each project utilised specific mechanisms to fulfil their project aims (and subsequently community benefit) within their one year period of funding, including working directly with community members, producing a report or publication or holding a participatory event. Most projects produced more than one of these.

All projects worked through partnership and interaction between the university and community organisations and for just under half the projects a primary community benefit was integral to these interactions across the whole life of the project. This was particularly notable when a key aim of the project was immediate social support to members of an existing social group (often on a one-to-one basis).

For example: Eastbourne Local Food provided therapeutic and supportive experiences for both local residents and those with mental health needs. **The Bigger Splash** provided additional expertise to assist the development of young swimmers. **How are you feeling?** helped stroke victims to articulate and recognise their experience. **Work, Write, Live** helped older people in a residential setting to retain and reflect on their memories.

- Two projects culminated in public consultation events while another two – both design projects – used exhibitions to summarise their activity and present it to a wider audience.



- Two further projects – both involved in the creation of poetry – presented their work through live poetry performance.
- Six projects involved a participative festival to deliver their aims. These included a commemoration event, a football festival, a food fair, an adventure playground event and a seed swap.

From the range of events which took place it is clear that carefully tailoring them to the nature of the project and the type of community partner was central. Sharing experiences of organising and delivering these events would be beneficial for other groups in the future.

Student Involvement

Sixteen out of the nineteen projects included student activity, involving a total of around 190 students, with an average of twelve per project.

However the actual number active within each project ranged widely from one (a PhD student, who also effectively led the whole project) to thirty, with five projects involving groups of over twenty students. These projects tended to be those where the student activity was nested strongly within the curriculum of a specific course. Where activity was adjacent to, rather than incorporated within the curriculum the typical size of student group was between six and nine. In two cases difficulties in recruiting led to only two students being involved.

Several projects involved student activity based on specific course and/or subject expertise. Students were deployed on the basis of already having a particular skill (or level of expert knowledge) which they could apply within the project and where their own corresponding benefit could be related back to their curriculum. Types of specialist skill/knowledge deployed included: questionnaire design and analysis; dietary and fitness advice; sports coaching; health care awareness and listening skills; health education; energy conservation in building use; street and neighbourhood design; design of three dimensional design and object making; historical research; making of poetry and drama; event organisation; journalism.



Representative student comments about the value of their involvement were:



For me the placement has been such a useful experience in finding the ways that history and politics can engage and captivate people.

Working as a Nutritional Advisor... allowed me to apply the knowledge that I have learnt on my course to new and interesting sporting situations within the area. I found applying this knowledge to questions parents had regarding their child's nutritional needs an interesting role to fulfil.

I would not have seen this in hospital.

This project has offered me the opportunity to work on a live project, to apply the skills I have learnt throughout my degree and to interact with the users of the building and the wider community with the aim of reducing the carbon footprint of the building.

Students identified the distinctive value of their involvement as the direct and unmediated contact it allowed with the potential clients, customers or users of the academic subjects they were studying. This was felt to be subtly different from that type of contact structured through a formal placement, which typically takes place through the frameworks of an employer organisation. A major (and necessary) function of a placement is to learn the (formal and informal) organisational rules and disciplines of a particular professional culture or large enterprise. In many *On Our Doorsteps* projects the focused volunteering provided something slightly different – and complementary.

Research

Projects were connected with research in ways which can be grouped into two main types:

- research enquiry (typically conducted by students) as a primary process of delivering a project
- subsequent academic research output (publications or conference papers).

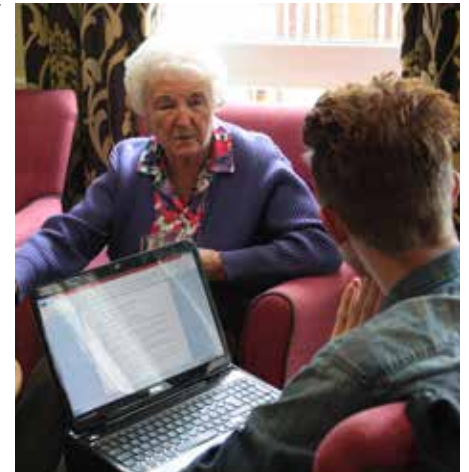
Nine projects included research conducted partly or wholly by students. Research methods used were varied, including design and conduct of questionnaires, field or condition surveys, interviews, archival research and production of objects. Community partner involvement in the research activity varied. In some cases research was co-designed and conducted, in some the community partner acted as the commissioner and primary audience for the research. In others community members were the direct subjects of research – and formed the initial audience/readership of the research outcomes.

There were also ten projects that produced academic research output but with somewhat limited correlation between these two groups of projects. Only five of the nine which included student research also resulted in academic public output.

The main causal factor here appears to be the degree of closeness of involvement of university staff in a project's research activity. Of the four projects which included student research but had no publications three had very limited staff involvement in the project and one involved a member of staff who left the university shortly after the completion of the project.

Of the ten projects which did produce academic research output, five led to recognised academic written research publication, two were extensively disseminated in major conference papers, two presented at more local conferences and one resulted in a travelling exhibition, including at a major London venue.

The experience of these projects suggests that where a project had the active involvement of a senior experienced researcher there was a high likelihood of a measurable research outcome. Where there was either limited university involvement in project leadership or leadership by staff less experienced in research the research publication possibilities of the project were much less likely to be pursued.



Developing Neighbourliness

One of the key defining features of this particular community engagement programme is already implied in its title, *On Our Doorsteps*. Core ideas for the programme included being a good neighbour and focusing on activities within the immediate localities of campus buildings.

Brighton has five campuses spread across three separate coastal urban areas each very differently situated. In the city there are: a City Centre campus at the heart of the city's cultural quarter; the Moulsecoomb campus set in a mixed residential and light industrial area; and the Falmer greenfield campus on the edge of the city, but close to some of its least affluent areas. In Eastbourne university buildings are situated among some of the most wealthy residential parts of the town, and in Hastings a new campus was constructed in the centre of a town during this period.

Brighton, then, is a university very much physically intertwined with diverse residential and commercial communities. On every campus practical issues of getting on with neighbours on big issues and small ones are therefore the stuff of daily life. The *On Our Doorsteps* programme was developed for a university with that particular characteristic.

Individual projects treated the idea of physical proximity in different ways:

- In fifteen (78%) projects the activity either centred on or included very specific physical locations as their main places of intervention.
- Two projects focused on a small number of streets in areas within a mile of the Moulsecoomb campus, while another considered the viability of a community farm on land to the north east of that campus. Three other projects were based in locations within a mile of the City Centre campus, while another two focused on a football stadium and a community centre directly bordering the Falmer campus. In Hastings one project centred on a community centre around three miles from the new campus.
- Three projects brought members of the community into the university itself, to university-sited vegetable and flower gardens in Eastbourne, to a food fair at the Brighton city centre and to a football festival and symposium on the Eastbourne campus.

- The remaining projects took a wider geographic remit. One worked with a group of organisations that covered the whole of the Hastings and Rother district, two others (in Hastings and Eastbourne) focused on the needs of their respective towns as a whole and one involved individual students working with many different organisations in different places.

In practice the requirement to work in close physical proximity to the university campuses proved no inhibitor to enabling a wide range of types and subject matter of projects. This may, have been different if the university had been on a single campus or not adjacent to such diversity of residential and commercial districts.

Continuing Community Benefit

A central aim of the *On Our Doorsteps* programme was to enable the establishing of 'long term relationships between university and community that can contribute to building neighbourliness'. This invites the question – what further activity occurred beyond the life of the funded project?

There were broadly five long term outcomes:

- continuation or continuing direct impact of the project activity itself;
- continuing impact of the project's achievements, but primarily only within the university;
- short term continuation (now ceased) of the project activity;
- indirect legacies of the project relationship;
- dormant relationships, capable of revival.

In six cases the work of the project continues to have a very direct positive value for the community partners. These include: one where the original project activity was replicated in 2013-14 and 2014-15 and is planned to continue in 2015-16 resulting in continuing benefit to the well-being of the residents of a care home; another where two gardening groups and related activity have continued uninterrupted since 2010; and a third where the new form of design brief for final year students has continued to be adopted by about 50% of the students in 2013-14 and 2014-15, resulting in the creation

of designs and objects of value to a wide range of local organisations.

There are two cases where the projects have had clear long term impacts, but mainly within the university community itself through an annual football festival and the development of an on-campus food cooperative. Thirdly there are examples of projects which did continue actively for a time after the funding period but then ceased – as the academic staff involved moved on to other roles.

There are a number of examples of positive, but indirect, effects of the work of projects through evidence of acceptance of student residents in local communities and positive changes in the relationship between a local community centre and a neighbouring comprehensive school.

Finally there are a number of projects which have resulted in continuing friendly relationships between the University and community organisations but without any immediate or specific actions resulting.

In one case although there was no continuation of the project itself after 2010, the relationship with the main community partner, has more recently been revived to support a new local regeneration project.



Longer Term Student and Curriculum Benefit

Of the nineteen completed projects thirteen showed a benefit for the future design/delivery of the curriculum and/or the student experience beyond the period covered by the one year's funding.

Benefit was of two main kinds.

In six cases (see above) the student project activity (or something closely related) was repeated in subsequent years and all but one of these is still continuing at the time of writing (2015).

In twelve cases the original projects led to forms of curriculum change which have affected a much wider body of students than those directly involved in the project activity itself.

In some cases this has been a matter of the whole orientation or 'colour' of a course curriculum e.g. the inclusion of social as well as design criteria in an architecture course, an increase in the

prominence of issues of sexuality and gender identity within sport courses and the development of three new degree courses in creative writing.

In other instances this has been a matter of developing new modules or enhancing the content of existing modules – in human geography, community psychology, hospitality management, nursing, occupational therapy and construction. In most cases new material has been included in modules taught by the actual staff involved in the projects, which has enabled them to discuss the project processes as well as presenting the new knowledge gained.

Overall, the extent of longer term curriculum benefit across the programme was often unanticipated. This may now seem less surprising for where else does the curriculum come from other than the recording of, and reflection on, specific innovative activity, whether through scholarship, laboratory or field research or practical activity? The lessons of these *On Our Doorsteps* projects are then that with a little more deliberate planning and focus from the beginning the degree of curriculum benefit (to a very wide student body) which can be derived from these projects may be one of their most enduring legacies.



Systemic Issues

Consideration of *On Our Doorsteps* projects as a whole also suggests some distinctive characteristics of the programme as it has evolved.

Subject Range

Academic staff and /or students from seventeen different subjects were represented across the nineteen projects. The largest grouping, as might be anticipated, is that of the social sciences, with a predominance of applied subjects. These comprised: Human Geography; Town Planning; Environmental Studies; Hospitality; Sports Studies; Business Studies; Education and Applied Social Sciences. Two design disciplines were represented – Architecture and 3-D Design – and also two humanities disciplines – History and English Literature.

The greatest concentration of disciplinary involvement was in the health professions area where Occupational Therapy figured in three projects and Nursing in two. Three applied science disciplines were involved – Sport Science, Land-based studies and Building Surveying. There is no obvious explanation for the breadth of this disciplinary involvement (there was no deliberate aim to seek subject diversity). One possibility is that there are only a limited number of academic staff across the university with an interest in this type of community engagement work and they are spread thinly across the academic schools. However what

the breadth does illustrate is the wide range of interests and needs which individual academics and community groups will bring forward for consideration and the diversity of academic subjects which can then be involved in work of this kind.

Roles and Identities

The initial proposition of university-community engagement tends to be binary. It is assumed that we are concerned with two separate entities that need to be brought into relationship – entities which, by implication, have sufficient differences in nature (aims, purposes, normative assumptions, rules) so as to require a process of understanding and negotiation in order to work together.

This is an entirely reasonable starting point. However the experience of the *On Our Doorsteps* programme suggests a rather more complex picture.

First, even just within the university, the projects delivered a number of different roles for students, relating mostly to where the student activity was placed along the spectrum from at one end being part of a compulsory

course curriculum to, at the other, general volunteering without any connection to any course. Equally staff roles varied in relationship to the degrees of autonomy which students were allowed and also in relation to the balance of project leadership between university staff and community partners.

More complicated however were situations where individuals were involved simultaneously on both sides of the partnership – that is as both members of the university and members of the community being partnered with.

In four cases the leading University member was also directly involved in a leading role in the type of community organisations being partnered with. One proponent was both a university lecturer and a trustee of a local Community Centre. The initiator and leader of another was both a part-time lecturer at the university and an employee of a local swimming club. Of the two university leaders of a gardening project one had previously been Chair and Secretary of a local Allotment Federation, while the other was a member of a local Community Environment Partnership. The university lead for a community farm project had a

long term direct personal involvement in the operation of a community farm.

In all these cases the projects offered the opportunity not so much to partner with a different entity as to bring together different parts of their individual life experience in new ways.

About half the projects had one clear community partner organisation, some of which were local voluntary residents' associations, while others sought to provide a community service to a disadvantaged group. A number of projects sought to work with more than one community partner, often with each taking a different role and at times representing different and conflicting interests. Issues causing conflict included the aspirations of a community development group being regarded unsympathetically by local residents and differences between competing professional perspectives. There were examples of different community partners taking complementary roles within a project and assuming co-ordination and leadership when university involvement was relatively weak.



The diverse and complex nature of all these relationships suggests that projects of this kind may be more usefully viewed as constituting a multi-dimensional community of practice rather than a binary partnership of two separate entities – a community of practice which not only brings together individuals and groups with different interests and skills but which also enables individuals to bring together their own separate roles and identities into a new unity.

Final Thoughts

As with most successful university-community engagement activity the *On Our Doorsteps* projects did not emerge out of thin air but were mostly built on already existing relationships or activity.

In seven cases this was essentially a matter of an existing university-based activity being extended or developed into a new context. These included: building on current Occupational Therapy course activity and on a proposal generated by the University's Sustainable Development policy to bring community partners into the university; using the experience of the long standing international Football for Peace community engagement project to develop a new community intervention; taking already developed practice in the teaching of creative writing and placing it in a community context; and developing a lecturer's existing research interests about issues of identity and loneliness in LGBT older people.

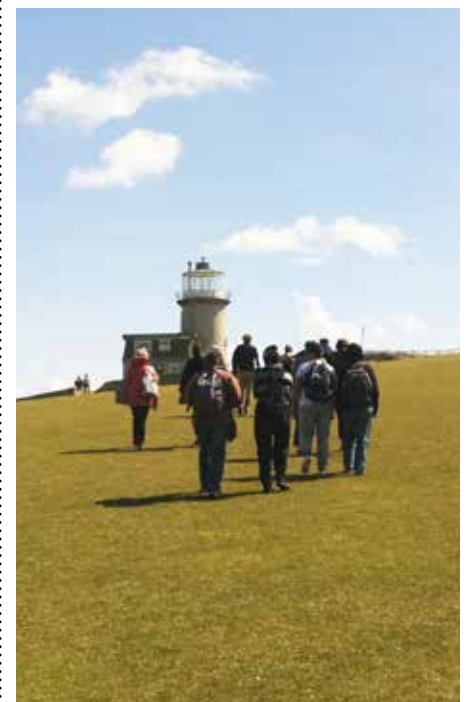
In six cases the nature of the projects was driven more directly by community partners and by their perception of community need. These included: an initial approach to the University's Hastings campus to replicate a project already existing in Brighton; a community association becoming aware of the project opportunity from CUPP publicity and approaching a member of the University who was a member of the city Community Voluntary Sector

Forum; and a proposal from a local charity which had been informed of the opportunity at a CUPP community meeting.

The origins of other cases were less clear-cut. One proposal was strongly led by the community partner but its origins can be traced back to an approach from CUPP to seek their involvement. Another was led by a university colleague but from the perspective of being a local resident. A third built on existing links between university staff and the community proposer but deliberately added a new university research partner to broaden the scope of the project.

While it is hard to draw any clear cut conclusions from this diverse picture there are a few notable observations. On the whole those projects which derived from existing university practice and/or had strong university staff involvement in the original bid had a greater chance of breadth of achievement and of longer term effect.

The pre-existence of an extensive, well-informed and supported network of both potential community partners and university staff was also crucial in the development and delivery of the overall programme. This network was and is provided for, replenished and sustained by the long term work of the CUPP organisation and staff, with the close support of the University's student volunteering service, *Active Student*. It would not have been possible to have operated a programme of this scale and breadth within the first few years of CUPP's operation when such a network was just being created and gradually strengthened.



Appendix

On Our Doorsteps projects 2010

Triangle Community Group Project

A scoping project to develop strategies to improve streets and houses in an area around Lewes Road named the 'Triangle'.

Rother and Hastings LGBT Project

A project to improve the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) people in Hastings, Rother and East Sussex by creating strategic networks between academic institutions, students, local communities and services.

Growing Local Food Project

A project to increase awareness of the benefits of and involvement with local food production, preparation and consumption among staff and students at different campuses and respective neighbouring communities, improving access to fresh, seasonal and healthy fare.

Eastbourne Local Food Initiative

An initiative to encourage local food cultivation in Eastbourne.

Community Town Planning Project

A project that aimed to stimulate more and better community engagement in local planning and regeneration.

Commemoration Project

A project that aimed to establish an ongoing exchange of skills and knowledge involved in practices of history-making and commemoration.

On Our Doorsteps projects 2011

Round Hill Community Project

This project aimed to foster and strengthen community spirit between all residents in the Round Hill area.

The Bigger Splash

This project aimed to develop an effective system for administrating, coordinating and mentoring the work of School of Sport and Service Management students within neighbourhood voluntary sports organisations.

Football and the Community

The project sought to examine how Brighton and Hove Albion FC, and its charitable trust, Albion In The Community, can work with local education partners to contribute to the creation of structures and services that might enable communities to become more resourced, healthy and productive, and their members to become more involved, engaged and powerful.

Getting in iTouch

This Eastbourne project facilitated neighbourliness between residents of care homes for older people, and university students studying to become Occupational Therapists on BSc and MSc programmes.

How Are You Feeling?

This poetry-writing project explored the feelings evoked through having/recovering from a stroke in order to shape positive rehabilitative narratives with stroke survivors.

Moulsecoomb Community Farm

The project explored the feasibility of developing a community farm on a piece of land above Moulsecoomb. The long term vision is to establish a small mixed farming project (horticulture, livestock, orchard, timber etc) on a commercially viable social enterprise basis.

Community Engagement for Health and Wellbeing

This project facilitated postgraduate student engagement in health and social care education at the Bridge Community Education Centre in Moulsecoomb.

On Our Doorsteps projects 2012

Reaching Out: Older LGBT People

The project brought together the University of Brighton with local charitable and community groups and organisations to discuss issues of social exclusion and inclusion of older LGBT people living in and around Eastbourne.

People Place Product: Crafting Communities in Brighton City

The main aim of this project was to demonstrate to students, staff and partners and the wider public the value of collaboration through design to address diverse issues of sustainability; socially, economically and environmentally.

Taking a Stand: Sexualities and sport participation

In particular, the project, through two key events, sought to raise awareness of the Charter for Action, the negative impact of homophobia and transphobia in sport and most importantly, the positive dimensions of sport and physical activity for often-marginalised LGBT groups and individuals.

The Bridge Community Centre

The aim of the project was to enable a group of young people to become more integrated within their own community by showcasing the Adventure Playground in Ore.

The Hanover Centre Carbon RACE (Reduction, Awareness, and Community Engagement)

This project was centred around reducing the carbon footprint of the Hanover Community Centre building located near University of Brighton's Moulsecoomb Campus.

Work Write Live - Sharing Life Stories

This project recounted autobiographical memories and shared them with other members of the community epitomising concepts of neighbourliness, offering good communication opportunities and encouraging reciprocity between the university and the project partners.



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