

# NESTA Event 'Re-Inventing the Civic University' - 01 October 2009

Professor Goddard's paper 'Re-Inventing the Civic University', written for NESTA, asks what universities are for, and argues that all publicly funded universities in the UK have a civic duty to engage with wider society, locally, nationally and globally. He argues that universities need to demonstrate an institution-wide commitment to public engagement, with the appropriate strategies and leadership to guide engagement at all levels.

## VC's response to John Goddard's provocation:

Thanks to John Goddard for his talk and for his very welcome paper.

The paper starts off with a fundamental question – what is a University for? This chimes with some of the statements by David Lammy recently, that the sector as a whole has not been very good at communicating its role in society. John's paper is very welcome. Bringing this agenda to the fore will help us tell our story better, benefiting both the public and our own staff and students. We should all be able to answer questions about our contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of our local communities and how this serves to meet national aspirations.

As John argues civic engagement goes back to our founding roots. Whilst John suggests several universities are starting to rediscover their civic roots, I am pleased to say this has not been lost at UWE. I see UWE as a mixed economy university, in terms of the categories outlined in the paper; and public engagement is strong. For example, UWE host's the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement. All of this I hope puts me in a good position to be able to briefly talk to you about what the civic university means for us, and to share the good practice that we are implementing or have developed.

Civic responsibility is fundamental to our values. Community is fundamental to our values. That means that it underpins all we do – it is not an add on when convenient. It is a guiding principle. It informs our mission, which for UWE is simply stated as, 'to make a positive difference to our students, business and society'.

This guiding principle is **embedded in our strategies and practices**; including for example, learning and teaching, research, sustainability, community volunteering and widening participation. We think not just in terms of our own students and staff, but also how our activities could benefit the surrounding local communities. For example, in terms of sports provision, holding a monthly farmers market, the activities of our Science Communication Unit (designed to increase public engagement with science), our links with over 350 schools and colleges (we began sponsoring Bristol City Academy in 2002), and our 12 partners in the UWE Federation, bringing higher education opportunities closer to users. In 2008/09 there were 116,885 recorded beneficiaries to our outreach activities, with UWE students investing over 28,000 hours in volunteering activities. These all present opportunities for Bristol as well as UWE. And we also supported Bristol's Green Capital Bid in 2008, through our sustainability and green transport initiatives.

In **Learning and Teaching**, we have introduced the Shell framework to accredit work-based and bite-sized learning. Our graduate development programme, placement opportunities and the project work of UWE students, all encourages engagement with businesses and the community. Programmes such as Aerospace Design Engineering and Radiotherapy have been supported by simulation equipment from BAE and the NHS respectively. And our degree shows, particularly in creative arts, make a cultural contribution to the region.

Our research strategy focuses on research that engages with real world problems, that engages with users, and drives us to build collaborative partnerships, with businesses, the community and other educational providers; in areas such as planning, housing, health, sustainability, robotics and education. **We have four research institutes that are inter-disciplinary and collaborative**, addressing some of the critical needs in our society. As John's paper mentions we are only one player in knowledge generation – that is why we are engaging with partners, to co-produce knowledge; knowledge exchange as opposed to knowledge transfer - we have long-recognised the importance of this.

As John's paper rightly points out, it is extremely important that **staff are recognised for this activity**, at all levels across the university. At UWE we have recently re-developed our standards, expectations, and career pathways for the UWE Academic, to be more explicit about how we value this activity; alongside and underpinning, teaching, learning, and research.

I am proud to say that UWE is engaged with the locality, people and place, co-generating knowledge and opportunities. This is part of our identity. I am also happy to say that these principles are highly apparent in the **region, through HERDA-SW**.

I do not suggest in any of this that civic engagement is easy though. John's paper identifies many **challenges** as well as opportunities. For example, **we constantly need to build more understanding with our partners**. At UWE we have initiated a regular meeting with regional CBI members to encourage communication, understanding and exchange. We are working with partners to build their 'capacity to reach into higher education', but as the paper highlights, we all need to do more.

We recognise UWE has much further to go, both in terms of our **campus development**, which is being designed to serve as a **physical and virtual hub** to connect people, businesses, the community, students and global society.

**Measurement is also very important**, for rewarding activity, showing recognition and demonstrating that it is priority.

And engagement isn't easy. It requires **skills, listening, time and resources across all levels in universities** and their partners. There is much more for us to learn and understand about civic and 'place-based' collaborative leadership, and how this can bring about significant innovation, as the new scoping study by Robin Hambleton and others, from our Cities Research Centre investigates, by drawing on international examples.

As John points out, there are challenges but it is essential that we tackle and overcome them.

Finally, I shall just say that it would be great to reach the point where we are able to bid for Civic status – this would really help us to communicate what we are about, particularly at a time when the public are rightly demanding to know what they are investing in. I thank you again for such a timely and thought provoking paper.

