

December 2006/49

Special initiative

Invitation to apply for funds

Initial applications should be submitted by Wednesday 14 February 2007

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Beacons for Public Engagement

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Beacons for Public Engagement

Invitation to apply for funds

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of SFC-funded higher education institutions Heads of HEFCW-funded higher education institutions
Of interest to those responsible for	Strategic planning; Links with business and the community; External relations; Research; Teaching and learning
Reference	2006/49
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Executive summary

Purpose

1. The UK higher education funding councils and Research Councils UK, in association with the Wellcome Trust, invite proposals from higher education institutions (HEIs) for collaborative Beacons for Public Engagement, including one National Co-ordinating Centre. A total of up to £8 million will be available over four years for this pilot initiative.
2. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) will support the scheme provided that Scottish and Welsh institutions are involved either as leads or partners in successful bids.

Key points

3. This initiative brings together the funding bodies for the first time to establish a co-ordinated approach to recognising, rewarding and building capacity for public engagement. In this context, 'public engagement' should involve specialists in higher education listening to, developing their understanding of, and interacting with non-specialists. The 'public' includes individuals and groups who do not currently have a formal relationship with an HEI through teaching, research or knowledge transfer.
4. The initiative seeks to address the recognised need for culture change within institutions in order to further support public engagement across all subject areas and the full range of activity by HEIs.

Action required

5. Initial applications should be completed, taking account of the requirements and guidance in paragraphs 32-40, and e-mailed to beacons.application@hefce.ac.uk by **Wednesday 14 February 2007**.

Introduction

6. Establishing a more co-ordinated approach to engaging with the public through working with partners is a feature of the strategic plans for each of the UK higher education funding councils, for Research Councils UK (RCUK), and for the Wellcome Trust.¹

7. To take forward that approach, the funding councils and RCUK are piloting an initiative to fund Beacons for Public Engagement (BPEs). The initiative will build on the good practice developed by a range of organisations including the Research Councils, individual higher education institutions (HEIs), the Wellcome Trust, the Royal Society, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and the British Academy. It also draws upon the findings of a survey by the Royal Society, RCUK and the Wellcome Trust, of factors affecting science communication by scientists and engineers.²

8. The survey identified a number of barriers to participation in public engagement by HEI staff. In particular the research-driven culture – including pressure to publish, attract funding for and build careers on ‘hard research’ – means that public engagement is not a priority within many HEIs. Public engagement is also seen as not well regarded by peers, and is difficult to undertake as it does not bring in significant funding. This initiative aims to address some of these issues.

9. The funding partners are committed to engaging the public in their work. They believe that public engagement activity makes people more aware of the opportunities open to them, and more empowered to take an informed part in the democratic process and the decisions affecting their lives. At the same time, activity of this kind makes young people, their families, individuals and groups more aware of the contributions made to the nation’s health, wealth and culture by different subjects and the links between them. Such activity will help secure the supply of those wishing to

become involved in higher education and research by enthusing and inspiring people of all ages through engagement with current developments in different subject areas, contemporary research and higher education opportunities.

10. The funding partners also believe that engaging with the public can ensure that research and other higher education activities continue to earn public confidence, and that it can improve the quality of work undertaken in HEIs.

11. If successful, this pilot initiative will increase the status of public engagement, leading to:

- evidence that initiatives are more joined up
- evidence that staff are building upon best practice
- more staff and students taking part in public engagement activities.

What is meant by public engagement

12. For the purposes of this initiative the term ‘public engagement’ covers a wide range of activities. Any good public engagement activity should involve specialists listening to, developing their understanding of, and interacting with non-specialists. It covers schemes that involve non-specialists in the work of HEIs and research institutes and centres, and can include participatory processes and activities in museums, arts festivals and science centres. However, it does not include activities where the primary purpose is to generate approval or acceptance of the institution (such as might be carried out by an organisation’s public relations department), or to recruit students, for example through open days.

13. The term ‘public’ includes individuals, groups, young people and their families who do not currently have a formal relationship with an HEI through teaching, research or knowledge transfer, but who may have an interest in these activities.

¹ ‘HEFCE strategic plan 2006-11’, ref HEFCE 2006/13, www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications; Scottish Funding Council Corporate Plan, to be published November 2006, www.sfc.ac.uk; HEFCW Corporate Plan, www.hefcw.ac.uk under About us; ‘RCUK Science in Society strategy’, www.rcuk.ac.uk/sis/strategy; Wellcome Trust Strategic Plan 2005-2010, www.wellcome.ac.uk/strategy/strategicplan

² ‘Survey of factors affecting science communication by scientists and engineers’, Royal Society, RCUK and Wellcome Trust, June 2006, available at www.royalsoc.ac.uk under Our work/Engaging with the public.

Aims and scope of the initiative

14. The aims of the initiative are to:

- create a culture within HEIs and research institutes and centres where public engagement is formalised and embedded as a valued and recognised activity for staff at all levels and for students
- build capacity for public engagement within institutions and encourage staff at all levels, postgraduate students, and undergraduates where appropriate, to become involved
- ensure HEIs address public engagement within their strategic plans and that this is cascaded to departmental level
- create networks within and across institutions, and with external partners, to share good practice, celebrate their work and ensure that those involved in public engagement feel supported and able to draw on shared expertise
- enable HEIs to test different methods of supporting public engagement and to share learning.

15. At the core of this initiative is the recognition that there is already a wealth of excellent activities and practice throughout the academic community and wider providers, but that there is a need to improve co-ordination, increase capacity and share best practice both within institutions and with other partners, and to embed this activity within the institutions' culture.

16. Therefore the creation of sustainable networks will be a key role of any BPE, whether at the institutional level, with local partners and professionals, or with other organisations. By thinking strategically about their roles and activities in public engagement, institutions may decide it is necessary to launch new initiatives or may choose instead to streamline and facilitate existing work, establish links and develop the infrastructure. Therefore applicants should demonstrate how they will collaborate with others in the field.

17. The BPEs will be expected to:

- enhance, embed and extend public engagement activities without duplicating provision supported under other schemes,³ such as those funded by the UK higher education funding councils, the Research Councils and the Wellcome Trust
- work with the UK higher education funding councils, RCUK and the Wellcome Trust to enable delivery of their strategies to engage the public in their work
- provide support and encouragement for staff and students, for example by raising awareness of funding and training opportunities, and addressing recognition and reward
- develop and implement networks and processes to disseminate activity appropriately to ensure that learning and best practice are spread across the sector
- measure and evaluate progress
- develop and implement plans for sustaining the activity beyond the period of funding.

18. Furthermore the BPEs are encouraged to consider (but not be restricted to) the following:

- some degree of experimentation in high quality and imaginative ways of engaging the public
- plans for embedding processes across the institution, for example by considering public engagement in staff development reviews
- working with providers of public engagement activities (such as research institutes, further education colleges, science centres, museums, galleries and related organisations) to ensure implementation of best practice without unnecessary duplication
- collaboration with institutions' existing functions (such as different academic departments, knowledge transfer and external relations) to share and embed learning across the institution.

19. The National Co-ordinating Centre will have an established track record in public engagement and will:

- build networks across the BPEs and with other organisations practising public engagement

³ See Annex A for details of relevant schemes.

- offer advice, guidance and information to staff and students involved, or wishing to become involved, in public engagement
- raise awareness of funding and training opportunities
- act as a knowledge resource to organisations and practitioners who are looking to develop new activities
- maintain an overview of activity across all the BPEs
- disseminate learning and good practice more broadly across the HE and research communities and the wider public engagement community
- act as a single point of contact between BPEs and other organisations involved in public engagement.

20. The initiative aims to develop networks to ensure that staff and students feel supported and encouraged to engage with the public; and are both aware of, and able to use, the expertise and best practice of others in the field. Therefore BPEs will provide points of contact for advice on best practice and networking, for all staff and students at HEIs and institutes and centres funded by the Research Councils and the Wellcome Trust.

21. To assist BPEs in working alongside existing activity, each BPE (including the National Co-ordinating Centre) will have a formal link to RCUK, either direct to a Research Council or via the RCUK Science in Society Unit.

22. If successful, it is hoped that this pilot scheme will be expanded to widen the geographical distribution of BPEs, ensuring that a wider range of institutions are participating and that the activities relate to the full range of academic disciplines and HE activities.

Eligibility

23. Applications are welcome from individual HEIs receiving funding directly from the UK higher education funding councils or any of the UK Research Councils. Applications are limited to one BPE per institution. Although HEIs may apply to host both a BPE and the National Co-ordinating

Centre, they should note that it is unlikely that any one institution would be awarded both.

24. It is expected that applications will be submitted in collaboration and/or partnership with other organisations involved in public engagement. These could include one or more of the following, though this list is not exclusive nor exhaustive:

- other HEIs
- research institutes and centres, including those funded by Research Councils or the Wellcome Trust
- non-governmental organisations such as museums, galleries, charities, science centres, botanic gardens or zoos
- industry and small and medium-sized enterprises.

Funding

25. The total funding available for the initiative is around £2 million per year, for four years following the funding announcement in September 2007. We are aiming to support around five BPEs – the exact number will depend on the quality and coverage of the bids received. There will be only one National Co-ordinating Centre.

26. A maximum of around £300,000 per year will be made available to any single BPE, and a maximum of around £500,000 per year for the National Co-ordinating Centre.

27. We would expect the amount of funding per BPE to vary depending on the scope of its activities and the extent of its collaboration with other institutions.

28. The proposal should be fully costed on the basis of full economic costs. It should also show any financial contribution from partners or other sources, with net funding requested under the BPE scheme.

29. Other than the funding allocated via this initial round, it is not anticipated that any extra money will be made available to successful institutions during the lifetime of the BPE. However, for activities outside the original business plan (see paragraph 35), they will be able to apply through the normal competitive routes to other funding streams managed by the funding partners.

Evaluation

30. Applicants should show how they intend to fulfil the aims of the initiative as set out in paragraph 14, as well as developing their own objectives and proposing a mechanism for the formative and on-going evaluation of the BPE, its interactions and activities.

31. In addition, the funding partners will have their own requirements for monitoring the BPEs, including the need for them to submit an annual report. The funding partners will commission an independent evaluation of the initiative as a whole, including an interim report during the third year, following which the future of the initiative will be reviewed. Funding of individual BPEs during the four years may also be reviewed if targets are not being met.

Guidance on applications

BPEs

32. The funding partners recognise that a BPE could be described in a number of ways, and invite HEIs to identify and describe what is distinctive about their proposed approach. Institutions should think flexibly and creatively about how they define their best practice beyond institutional, departmental or subject boundaries in order to create a true 'beacon', with strong networks with other organisations. They should be able to demonstrate their track record in public engagement, the drivers and thinking behind their plans to develop as a BPE, and institutional support for the initiative.

33. While BPEs should cover a wide range of activities, each might wish to concentrate on a distinctive 'theme' which provides a focus for achieving culture change within the HEI so that public engagement becomes an important and recognised part of its activities. Such themes could be, but are not restricted to:

- creating dialogue between academics, researchers and the wider public in areas which might inform decision making
- combining activities from different subject disciplines in innovative and meaningful ways

- collaborating between institutions to broaden and deepen the scope of provision and share good practice in ways which enrich people's lives
- concentrating activity within a specific region or sub-region of the UK.

National Co-ordinating Centre

34. Applicants to host the National Co-ordinating Centre should demonstrate a strong track record in different types of public engagement with different audiences, involving a range of staff and students, and evidence of embedding this activity in the HEI's day-to-day activities, as well as successful dissemination of good practice.

Assessment of applications

35. The assessment process will be in four stages:

- a. Applications will be reviewed by a selection panel of representatives from the funding partners as well as external, independent experts. The panel will meet to create a shortlist of applicants for both the BPEs and the National Co-ordinating Centre.
- b. Short-listed applicants will then be provided with further guidance and invited to submit a full business plan.
- c. Short-listed applicants will be asked to suggest three referees, and the funding partners will approach one of them or more if necessary. A further two referees will be selected by the funding partners. Referees will be required to provide written comments on the business plan, which will be sent to applicants to enable them to respond.
- d. An interview panel will meet with the short-listed applicants and make recommendations to the funding partners on the BPEs to be supported. The interview panel will include high-level representatives from the funding partners and an external, independent expert.

36. In deciding on the applications to be short-listed, the selection panel will take into account the following:

- the public engagement expertise of the team
- demonstration of networking potential

- evaluation and dissemination plans
- quality of concept
- high-level and cross-institution commitment to the aims of the initiative
- quality of partnerships
- value for money
- a cost-effective and credible work plan
- the theme (if appropriate, see paragraph 33)
- the geographical spread of the initiative as a whole.

Application process

37. All applications should be submitted by e-mail, using the forms at Annexes B and C.

38. Evidence of high-level and cross-institution commitment to the aims of the initiative should be in the form of a supporting letter from the head of the institution. This should be returned electronically with the initial application.

39. Additional material will not be considered. Electronic versions of the forms are available on the HEFCE web-site with this document at www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications. The answers to frequently asked questions will also be available on the web.

40. Application forms should be e-mailed to beacons.application@hefce.ac.uk by midday on **Wednesday 14 February 2007**. Late applications will not be accepted.

Timetable

14 February 2007	Deadline for submission of initial applications
Early March 2007	Selection panel to short-list applications
Mid March 2007	Announcement of shortlist and guidance provided for full business plans
Mid June 2007	Deadline for submission of full business plans
June-July 2007	Review of business plans by referees
August 2007	Applicants given opportunity to respond to referees' comments
September 2007	Interviews. Funding announcement
January 2008	All BPEs in operation

Annex A

Relevant existing schemes

Beacons for Public Engagement will need to ensure that they are aware of existing public engagement initiatives in order to avoid duplication and, where appropriate, to work alongside existing activities. Such initiatives include the following.

Research Councils' schemes:

- Researchers in Residence
- National Science Week Awards
- UK GRAD programme
- public engagement grant schemes run by individual Research Councils
- BA (British Association for the Advancement of Science) CREST awards
- 'How Science Works' continuing professional development courses for science teachers
- BA Perspectives scheme
- public engagement training for researchers.

Funding Councils' schemes:

- HEFCE's business and community projects funded through the Higher Education Innovation Fund
- volunteering activities funded through HEFCE's Higher Education Active Community Fund
- widening participation activities, including support for science, technology, engineering and mathematics
- Aimhigher activities
- SFC funding for cultural engagement
- engagement activities supported via HEFCW's Third Mission Fund and its Reaching Wider Fund, particularly in relation to Reaching Wider Partnerships
- third mission projects supported via the Welsh Assembly Government's Knowledge Exploitation Fund.

Wellcome Trust schemes:

- Engaging Science grant scheme
- Science Learning Centres
- support for science centre exhibitions
- Researchers in Residence.

Annex B

Application to host a Beacon for Public Engagement (BPE)

This form is available to download from the HEFCE web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk, with this document under Publications. Completed forms should be e-mailed to beacons.application@hefce.ac.uk by **Wednesday 14 February 2007**.

NB Institutions may apply to host a BPE and to be the National Co-ordinating Centre, but it is highly unlikely that both would be awarded to the same institution. Separate application forms should be completed for each.

Please use a minimum font size of 10pt, and keep to the word limits for each section. Additional material will not be considered.

1. Principal applicant

Surname:	Forename(s):
Title:	Position:
Institution:	
Address for correspondence:	
Postcode:	Tel:
Fax:	e-mail:

2. Partners and/or collaborators. Please provide the following information for each partner and/or collaborator; you can copy and paste the text as required.

Contact name:	Position:
Organisation:	
Address:	
Postcode:	Tel:
Fax:	e-mail:
Role of partner/collaborator (maximum 150 words):	
Cash/In-kind contribution:	

3. Details of the current and recent public engagement activity of the principal HEI and its partners and/or collaborators. This should include the experience of key members of staff.

(Maximum 350 words)

4. Outline plans for the BPE, including:

- proposed activities
- overall timetable
- objectives and measurable success criteria
- roles and responsibilities of key people
- theme (if appropriate – see HEFCE 2006/49, paragraph 33).

Indicate how the BPE will link with the funders' strategic plans.

Please also describe how the proposal will build on and integrate with other public engagement initiatives related to your chosen theme (if appropriate).

(Maximum 1,300 words)

5. Describe how your BPE will enable a move towards a culture where public engagement is a valued activity for staff at all levels and students.

(Maximum 300 words)

6. Outline plans for dissemination and fulfilling the role as a point of contact (see HEFCE 2006/49, paragraph 20).

(Maximum 200 words)

7. Outline plans for evaluation.

(Maximum 200 words)

8. Funding.

Total value of bid:
Total value of contributions from partners and/or collaborators:
Cash:
In-kind:
Breakdown of estimated costs, based on full economic costs.

Annex C

Application to host the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

This form is available to download from the HEFCE web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk, with this document under Publications. Completed forms should be e-mailed to beacons.application@hefce.ac.uk by **Wednesday 14 February 2007**.

NB Institutions may apply to host a BPE and the National Co-ordinating Centre, but it is highly unlikely that both would be awarded to the same HEI. Separate application forms should be completed for each.

Please use a minimum font size of 10pt, and keep to the word limits for each section. Additional material will not be considered.

1. Principal applicant

Surname:	Forename(s):
Title:	Position:
Institution:	
Address for correspondence:	
Postcode:	Tel:
Fax:	e-mail:

2. Outline plans for the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, including:

- proposed activities
- overall timetable
- objectives and measurable success criteria
- management structures
- roles and responsibilities of key people.

Ensure that you specifically detail how you will fulfil each of the requirements for the National Co-ordinating Centre set out in HEFCE 2006/49 paragraph 19.

(Maximum 1,500 words)

3. Please give details of any key partners.

(Maximum 200 words)

4. Details of the current and recent public engagement activity of the principal HEI and any partners.

(Maximum 350 words)

5. Describe how your approach will enable a move towards a culture where public engagement is a valued activity for staff and students at all levels across HEIs and other partners.

(Maximum 300 words)

6. Outline plans for evaluation of your own activity as the National Co-ordinating Centre.

(Maximum 300 words)

7. Funding.

Total value of bid:
Total value of contributions from partners and/or collaborators:
Cash:
In-kind:
Breakdown of estimated costs, based on full economic costs:



wellcometrust

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