

How Universities Support Public Engagement? A Comparative Global Study of Institutional Structures, Incentives, and Barriers

This project explores how universities across different global contexts support or unintentionally hinder public engagement and aims to develop a practical institutional framework and toolkit for embedding meaningful engagement.

Institutional culture strongly determines who participates, and what kind of engagement happens. So, without structural change, engagement may remain limited.

Research Questions:

1. How is public engagement supported across institutions?
2. What incentives exist?
 - Promotion criteria?
 - Funding models?
 - (Workload) Recognition?
3. What barriers do academics face?
 - Time constraints?
 - Lack of training?
 - Institutional culture?
4. How do structures differ globally?
5. What models enable meaningful engagement? i.e. comparison across partner institutions

One can do online searches as well as asking people in the target institutions to provide publicly available documents, links, or answer general questions rather than opinion, etc. to avoid **Ethical Approval**.

You can include the following items in your research:

1. Institutional Mapping: Compare universities on:

- Funding mechanisms
- Dedicated engagement offices
- Strategic priorities
- Motivations
- Barriers
- Incentives

2. Policy Analysis

- Promotion and tenure criteria
- Engagement strategies
- National frameworks (e.g., REF/KEF vs others)

You can also do comparative case studies

- Universities with strong engagement cultures vs weak ones
- Identify “what makes the difference”

We can possibly develop “Institutional Readiness Model for Public Engagement”.

Levels might include:

1. Ad hoc – no structure, individual efforts
2. Supported – some funding/training
3. Embedded – integrated into strategy
4. Transformative – engagement reshapes research/teaching

The project outputs can include:

- Institutional self-assessment tool
- Best practice framework
- Policy brief for university leadership
- Benchmarking report across partners

It can also have a final output like a Toolkit which can include:

1. Institutional Self-Assessment Tool: score your university across dimensions
2. “Readiness Framework”: identify current level
3. Action Planning Template: steps to improve
4. Good practice case studies

Project Team

Contributor's name	Email	LC Name	Target Institution(s)	The reason you have chosen that institution
Hesam Khajehsaeid	Hesam.khajehsaeid@warwick.ac.uk	International Engagement	UK	Russel Group Universities
Stephen Soanes (also to check with wider International Partnership Managers)	S.Soanes@warwick.ac.uk	International Engagement	EUTOPIA Alliance members (<u>European</u> : CY, GU, NOVA, TUD, UBB, UL, UNIVE, UPF, VUB; <u>Global</u> : ASU, KNU, MU, SU, UIR, UNIANDES)	EUTOPIA Alliance is focus for 75-80% of ISR's Europe-focused partnerships activity, as part of long-term EC-backed mission to create Europe-wide campus. Mapping to support harmonisation and sharing of good practice is a core focus for our work. Warwick has close contact with counterpart EUTOPIA Institutional Coordinators that could support with mapping. MU and SU also connected via wider ISR teams for Australasia (MWA Alliance and SU-UW bilateral). Potentially wider institutions we might include (members of Guild of European Research Intensive Universities, especially Luxembourg and Groningen where we have further bilateral interests)

				Note that there might be further networks we could explore if wider European institutions were of interest to the group (e.g., via FOREU4ALL for cross-Alliance)
James Hodgkinson	j.r.hodkinson@warwick.ac.uk	International Engagement	Monash, Melbourne and LaTrobe Universities	I am often based in Melbourne, will be attending the Engagement Australia Conference later in July 2026, where I will meet colleagues from these institutions. They also represent three contrasting types of university and will provide a local contrast that will reflect back well on the UK's HE sector.