

Goldsmiths' response to the UPP Foundation's Civic University Commission call for evidence

1. What activities by your institution do you think have an impact on local people's lives?

Goldsmiths' Community Engagement Strategy has adopted a 'whole institution' approach to civic engagement within our community. Our five strategic priorities are to:

1. Form strategic partnerships in our local communities
2. Embed ourselves as part of the local education and skills infrastructure
3. Support the Lewisham economy and form partnerships with local enterprise hubs
4. Make our knowledge and learning accessible to the widest community
5. Be a good neighbour.

The whole institution approach implies that we wish to bring all of our resources: our students, our staff, our space and facilities and our economic power as an employer, to have a positive impact on our community.

The actions we take to support those priorities will range from partnerships with voluntary sector organisations where our students will become volunteers, to a community library membership scheme that offers local residents access to our library and special collection resources. We regularly take part in local festivals showcasing our student talent but also opening up public engagement with our research. A good example of recent public engagement activity in research was the 2017 commemorations for the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Lewisham where we led a group of local partners to put on a range of activity including history walks, locating unseen archive footage of the event and holding public screenings, and engaging the council and local residents in the appointment of a civic plaque to remember.

We offer our space for community events and meetings at low or no cost - as an example over the last three years we have let space to the community that would have had a commercial value in excess of £100,000. We ensure that all of our job vacancies are advertised locally, have a commitment to pay as a minimum the London Living Wage and actively promote procurement opportunities to local businesses. In terms of local people accessing our education, Goldsmiths offers undergraduate scholarships to residents of Lewisham, we also offer extended degree programmes, which recruit a large number of local non-traditional students. We have recently developed our short courses and we offer a discount to local residents, recruitment has been strong amongst residents of southeast London boroughs.

In terms of the importance of local strategic partnership, we have a MoU in place with the London Borough of Lewisham (signed in 2016) to underpin the strategic work we wish to do together. This focuses on 3 themes; Lewisham Community, Lewisham Skills, and Lewisham Economy. The MoU was signed by our Warden and the Executive Mayor of Lewisham and is driven by a wide group of officers with the local authority and staff in Goldsmiths who meet regular to review and monitor the partnership working to ensure actions are being achieved. This strong strategic relationship allowed us to partner with Lewisham to participate in the pilot Leading Places programme (LGA/HEFCE), we are part of phase 2 of the pilots and our project has brought together a number of other strategic partners including Lewisham Hospital, Lewisham Homes, Phoenix Housing Association and Lewisham and Southwark College. We have worked together on the 'Lewisham Deal' which arises from the Lewisham Poverty Commission, led by the Council and with one of our academics as an expert advisor, one of the arising sets of recommendations concerned what local anchor organisations such as Goldsmiths could do to strengthen the local economy. Over the last 6mths we have focused on procurement and apprenticeships.

2. Which of these activities do you currently measure and which would be possible to measure in future? What are the results?

The action plan which supports our Community Engagement Strategy measures a range of activities - for example, in relation to procurement, we do a postcode analysis of our procurement spend so that we can see how much of our non-staff annual spend is reaching local businesses, or, we monitor the number of student volunteer placements in local organisations. There is a wide range of measures. However, it is fair to say that we have struggled to find a means of measuring actual impact of our activity in the local community. There are metrics that we have used to estimate economic impact of our students (the work of CURDS) but we recognise that there is a wider impact that we will struggle to measure in terms of outcomes. As we are still in the relatively early stages of our Community Engagement Strategy (2014) we are focusing our effort on activity indicators at the stage. We would of course welcome a view from the Commission as to impact measures that we could employ in the future.

3. If you could tell local people three things about what the university does and why they're important to them what would they be?

Education, skills and workforce development - many Goldsmiths graduates stay local; the local public sector workforce in terms of teachers, social workers, local government officers, as well as the burgeoning creative and digital industries, will include many Goldsmiths graduates.

Active citizenship & cultural hub - whilst student communities maybe transient, we are conscious that during our time with us many of our students become active as citizens within the local community not just the university campus. A recent high profile example of this was the support the Goldsmiths staff and student community gave to the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign. At a more local level many of our students (and staff) are engaged with local community and residents groups whether it be through volunteering or campaigning. We are a significant hub of cultural activity in southeast London - we have our new Centre for Contemporary Art opening in September 2018 - this will attract world-class exhibitions and be open to the public. It will complement other cultural activity facilities such as the newly refurbished George Wood Theatre, the Goldsmiths Curzon cinema and our wider public events programme - where we have 100s of events, everything from poetry jams to recitals and concerts throughout the year.

Employment and economy - universities are often one of the largest employers in their local communities and provide both jobs and economic stimulus to local businesses. We are aware that sometimes we need to think at an earlier stage how our campuses and policies can be designed to maximise this economic effect.

4. What do you think are the negative impacts of universities on local people, if any? Do you think the university has any responsibility to ameliorate these, and if so how?

University as neighbour - badly planned and communicated changes to University estate can have a negative impact on local residents - we try to ameliorate by inviting local residents and local councillors to master plan workshop and exhibitions. We recognise living alongside a university when parts of the campus have been in a construction phase can be difficult but we try to minimise the impact of works and communicate the benefits to local residents, for example we are currently completing the build of a new Centre for Contemporary Art which will be open to the public and have an engagement programme focused on local schools.

Students are very much valued by the community as volunteers and active citizens and purchasers of local goods and services, but they can sometimes be subjects of complaints local residents because of noise disturbance when they are in private rented accommodation (we have few complaints about residents in our halls of residence). We have appointed a Stakeholder Engagement Manager based in our accommodation services in part to provide a first point of contact to deal with any local resident complaints and provide an out of hours service recognising that problems often occur during non-business hours.

The economic impact of universities is clearly a positive - research demonstrates this - however, there is a perception at least in London that universities and their growing numbers of students may have contributed to the inflation of housing prices and gentrification.

5. What barriers do you face - financial, regulatory, legislative, or cultural - in fulfilling your ideal civic role, and from whom? Which of these if any should be removed?

We are concerned that with the demise of HEFCE, the funding support that HEFCE made available through its Catalyst programme to support universities taking up their role as anchor institutions will not be replaced. OfS has a different role and remit. In relation to our own finances, Goldsmiths has broken even over the last few years so it is a sensitive issue as to how much resource should be spent on community-facing activity when the majority of our income comes from student tuition fees. Whilst our Students' Union is supportive of community engagement activity, we are conscious that within the local community there has been some cultural wariness of Goldsmiths in the past and so we feel it is important to at the very least maintain our current level of activity for the good of our wider community relations.

6. What leadership role should universities play in bringing together various actors and agencies to support the economic, social, and cultural development of your area?

We believe that Universities are well positioned to take on a leadership role amongst local partners - our view of local affairs is broad: at Goldsmiths we are members of our local Safer Lewisham Partnership (Crime, Disorder, Reduction Partnership), we are a Centre of Excellence for social work teaching partnerships with 3 south east London boroughs, we are members of Lewisham Local which is a forum for partnership working with the local and community voluntary sector. This breadth means that we are well networked locally and have many relationships with lots of different agencies at all sorts of levels of organisation.

7. Do you think there are sensible ways that universities could be better incentivised to behave civically?

Project funding - for a modest input but effective at culture change and creating flag bearers for partnership working. As we have an increasing focus on the notion of accounting for our tuition fee income in relation to student outcomes, specific project funding that can help us reach out to work with local partners is really important. The former HEFCE Catalyst funds would be a good example of the kind of funding source could be invaluable to this area of work.

8. How would you measure the success of a civic university: on a 5yr timescale, 20yr timescale, 100yr timescale?

20yr timescale

9. How does your institution engage with local democratic bodies and what difference does it make?

Our relationship with the local authority is detailed above (MoU); in addition we also have regular contact with our local ward councillors and have made presentations and done Q&As at local ward assembly meetings. They are two contrasts between strategic engagement at the highest level between the Wardens and Mayor's offices, and the local ward assembly that is highly reflective of very local concerns expressed by residents.

10. How would you ensure, through your organisational structures, that you could fulfil your civic role?

Our Community Engagement Strategy is key to this - as an example, a sub-committee of our Council monitors this on a termly basis.

The health and existence of key strategic partnerships with anchor organisations such as the local council and NHS trust - making sure that it is somebody's job to make and maintain such relationships on behalf of the organisation.

Goldsmiths, University of London
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