Community-University Partnerships in London
Strategic Actions
June 2020

Grassroots community groups are vital for democracy, sustainability and culture in London. London is world renowned for its universities. London's community and university sectors have demonstrated their immense value during the current pandemic, yet both face significant threats in coming months and years. Stronger collaboration between universities and community groups in London will bring mutual benefit and deliver much greater value to the city and its diverse communities, in the current crisis and beyond. It will also strengthen the civic role of universities, an area of growing attention and action.

Just Space **is** a network of grassroots community groups who have more than 13years' experience workingin collaboration with universities, in their teaching, research and public engagement. In 2019, together with UCL, Just Space convened a series of workshops, meetings and case studies to share best practice and develop a London-wide strategy for community-university collaboration. The Collaborate project was led by a steering group of community and university representatives and engaged more than 100 people in participatory events. The project produced a case study report entitled *Collaborate*, a short film and this strategy.

The actions in this strategy will be taken forward by the community and university members of the Collaborate project. Funding will be sought to enable this. All of London's universities and community networks are invited to input and support this work.

1. Purpose
This strategy aims to widen and deepen partnerships between universities and grassroots community groups in London in order to:
- Enhance university learning and student experience by recognising, acknowledging and drawing on community-based knowledge
- Strengthen community action and democratic participation through greater access to university-based knowledge and resources
- Demonstrate the civic value of universities, and their staff and students, as members of local communities
- Demonstrate the civic value of community groups whose activities bring together people at the grassroots, as key contributors of knowledge, experience and creativity

2. Principles
Partnership is based in respect, trust and equity. It aims to ensure mutual recognition and benefit from working together towards shared ambitions. It acknowledges the institutional power and wealth of universities, in contrast to the marginalisation of grassroots communities. Working across such a power imbalance requires specific skills, structures and resources, as well as deep cultural change and long-term commitment from both parties.

ACTION 1: A Charter for Community-University Partnerships in London for universities and community groups, outlining shared principles and commitments.

ACTION 2: Adopt a protocol for ethical community-based research, teaching and public engagement by university staff and students, based on the Just Space research protocol.

3. Governance

University strategies and decisions are remote and opaque for community groups. Stronger partnerships will be supported by greater transparency and clarity about university priorities, and opportunities to influence them.This will also enable community groups to contribute and develop relationships with relevant departments in delivering university strategies. Universities can also benefit from learning more about the development of community processes over time, especially about community strategies that have enabled success and resilience.

Universities, research and scholarship have typically benefitted from the legacy of colonialism, while marginalised communities in London continue to experience the negative consequences of colonial exploitation and dispossession. Decolonisation of universities has to date focussed on the curriculum, and this needs to be expanded to engage in more meaningful structural and procedural reform in support of new, more effectiveforms of relationship with groups which experience marginalisation across London as a result of the legacies of colonialism.

ACTION 3: Universities and community groups to share strategic plans with each other, including processes for how they are developed,to consider how community groups can contribute to future strategic planning for universities and how universities can enhance and support effective community strategies.

ACTION 4: Universities to widen and promote opportunities for community representation on committees and boards, including Senate or Council, whilst working to ensure that their presence is effective and relevant.

ACTION 5: Community groups to be supported to develop case studies based upon experiences of engagement with universitiestodecoloniseuniversity structures and processes and transform relationships with all affected, particularly with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

4. Structures

Engagement between universities and grassroots communities is constrained by the contrasting nature of their organisation. Universities are highly structured while grassroots groups are required to remain flexible and adaptive in order to be effective, responsive and resilient. This contributes to cultural and practical misalignment. It is difficult for community groups to gain access to universities and work within their systems. Universities struggle to reach marginalised communities andmaintain relationships that are responsive to their needs and acknowledge their contributions. An intermediary, hybrid organisational form is needed to bridge this gap, developing systems that can respond to each party's complex needs. Systems generally, an in particular those for decolonisation, need to be proactively developed if structures are to reflect the need for egalitarian processes that support learning for both parties and enhance resilience.

London Community-University Collaborateis proposed as a formal network to connect a group ofanchor universities to local communities, to co-ordinate London-wide strategic issues of community concern, and to share best practice. The Collaborate network would have funding for a community coordinator or small team to undertake partnership building and strategy delivery. It will sit outside of university institutional structures and be composed of community and university members on an equal basis. Participants in the Collaborate network would be signatories to the Charter for Community-University Partnerships in London (see ACTION 1).

ACTION 6: Establish London Community - University Collaborate networkto build partnerships and develop suitable, and decolonial,systems and structures for the interface between local community groups and anchor universities, located in different parts of the city.

Each universityin London hasa differentapproach to making connections between university staff and students and community groups.Different forms of brokerage services exist to build relationships, such as public engagement teams, student volunteering services, practice placements and discipline-specific units. Stronger co-ordination and sharing of information and bestpractice across universities, informed by community needs and knowledge, is needed to expand and optimise these services. This includes face-to-face and online mechanisms for matching community and university participants,supporting and monitoring projects and evaluating outcomes.

ACTION 7: Expand, promote, support and co-ordinate community brokerage services in London universities, involving community groups in service design and delivery.

5. Connections

Established on the premise of providing a service for London communities, universities undertake a range of events and activities to build relationships with community groups. Stronger community involvement in setting the agenda and format of networking and relationship building activities would enable stronger partnerships.

ACTION 8: Universities and community groups to explore opportunities for greater, more effective interfaces throughco-produced networking and partnership building activities that are adequately resourced.

Residencies and secondments are established mechanisms for knowledge transfer and collaboration building; however, very few examples exist with the community sector in London.Residencies for community members to contribute to teaching and research within university departments enable those residents to understand better the university structure and process and to learn alongside university staff. Residencies for university staff to spend time embedded in community groups provide similar, symmetrical opportunities. In addition, such work supports Universities to develop material for teaching, data for research, contribute to community processes to finding effective solutions and learning how community groups function.

ACTION 9: Develop a pilot residency programme for the collaborative exchange of university staff and community members.

London universities have diverse specialisms, resources and cultures, which are often opaque and inaccessible, especially for those outside the university sector. Community groups with specific needs can find it difficult to know which university to approach for collaboration, engagement or support. Equally, community groups are highly attuned to the needs of their localities and it is essentialfor universities to understand what communities are engaged in doing over time and what challenges are being negotiated, in order to develop concrete and sustainable relationships.

ACTION 10: Publish a prospectus document of strengths of different universities for community groups to know where to access specific expertise in London. This will work alongside ongoing community-led mapping of community groups and their activity and needs, which needs to be kept up to date.

6. Curriculum

Community-based collaboration requires transferrable skills and knowledge, as well as subject and context specific expertise. Community members contribute to teaching in several London universities. Sharing materials and resources between courses and universities will help widen exposure and improve quality. Community involvement in designing and delivering modules, in collaboration with university teaching staff, deepens student experience and learning. It also makes best use of community representatives' time and expertise, which can be inefficiently expended in unstructured engagement with students.Engaging expertise from diverse communities of interest and locality enables decolonisation to become more established within the curricula of the universities and makes them more robust.

ACTION 11: Engage expertise from diverse community groupsto develop learning materialsfor use across different university-community programmesthat support wider and deeper community engagement andaddress issues in London that are challenging and meaningful.

Decolonising the curriculum has been a recent focus in someuniversities, especially in the humanities and social sciences. Community members with experience of racism and the legacy of colonial exploitation as well as with expertise and interest in the subject area may have a strong commitmentto decolonising the curriculum and the deep expertise that could contribute to new curriculum.

ACTION 12: Establish a platform within London universities to share best practice and materials for decolonising the curriculum, including co-production of curriculum with organisations and members of colonially exploited communities.

University staff and community groups working together have established expertise and experience and this benefit can be further shared with peersat university and community members.

ACTION 13: Establish Action Learning Groups of university staff and community members on issues of mutual interest, such as partnership working, decolonisation and curriculum design.

Community members have deep knowledge of London specific issues and wider trends and topics. Working with students and university staff further expands community knowledge, though typically without formal recognition.

ACTION 14: Universities to provide formal recognition and accreditation of learning from community members who contribute to and participate in community-based projects or teaching, to support lifelong learning and widen access to education. Recognition should also be given to learning from the experiences of community groups, and the access provided to research material.

ACTION 15: Free places available to eligible community members on short-courses or summer schools that involve community-based learning or case studies. Community organisations can be supported to offer residencies for staff and students on such courses within community spaces.

7. Resourcing

Community access to basic resources such as meeting space, photocopying and libraries has been severely impacted by government austerity. Universities share resources with community groups to support activities, though typically on an ad hoc basis. Structured and transparent systems for sharing resources would come with a very low or no cost to universities and deliver transformative benefits to grassroots community groups. For instance, allowing registered community groups to book university rooms out of hours for meetings without charge, providing associate membership of libraries and small photocopying or printing allowances would be highly welcomed.The registration process will be developed jointly with grassroots community groups with whom the university is working.Access to university resources gives recognition to the value that community groups providein facilitating community learning opportunities to university students and staff.

ACTION 16: Universities to work with grassroots community groups to develop a process for registration of community groups for enhanced access to university resources.

ACTION 17: University libraries to work with registered community groups to provide access to academic journals, books and other resources.

ACTION 18: Universities to provide no cost room hire to registered community groups, share best practice and publiciseto appropriate community groups.

Open access to university research publications is a transformative agenda, welcomed by community groups. Access to research publications requires knowledge of library and journal services and systems. Community partners would benefit from open access systems that account for their specific needs.

ACTION 19: Community groups to work with university libraries and research administrationto develop policies and systems that provide open access to academic research publications.

ACTION20: Research outputs from community collaboration or participation to be disseminated in a format that is appropriate, accessible and agreed by community members (see Just Space research protocol).

8. Evaluation

Evaluation of community and public engagement programmes and projects has rapidly evolved in recent years, demonstrating impacts of specific activities. Comprehensive evaluation of sustained community-university partnerships is needed to characterise the wider impacts for universities and communities. This could include local community development, widening access to university courses, local employment, investment in community assets, student experience, and innovation in research and teaching.

ACTION 21: Establish a comprehensive, long term evaluation framework for community-university partnerships.

Action List

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