Project Title

How are UK-based university academics responding to the requirements to plan for, enact and report impacts derived from publicly-funded research?

Key words

engaged research; organisational and cultural change; higher education

Supervisory team

PI: Professor Richard Holliman (OU, STEM)
Co-Is: Dr Lesley Hoggart, (OU; WELS); Dr Toni Gladding (OU; STEM)

Is the PhD suitable for part time study?

Yes

Project Highlights:

- Exploring how researchers perceive and value engaged ways of working
- Investigating how researchers are responding to the research impact agenda
- Assessing the methodologies and methods used to support engagement between researchers, stakeholders, end-users and members of the public.

Overview:

Much has been written over the past 10 years about engaged academic practices (e.g. Holliman et al. 2017; Holliman et al. 2009). In the main, this literature has focused on the theoretical and practical implications of engaging publics, stakeholders and end-users as a pathway to generating impacts from research (e.g. Holliman, 2017; Grand et al. 2015).

Recent research has explored physical science researchers’ perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they faced in the course of balancing engagement activities alongside other aspects of their careers (e.g. Duncan et al. 2016), whilst related work has sought to increase our understanding of systems used to create, support, and evaluate high-quality engagement (Holliman et al. 2018).

Practically, researchers have also explored principled approaches in support of holistic planning, management and evaluation of engaged research (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: The principles of engaged research design.](image-url)
This PhD will explore the changing landscape for publicly-funded research in the UK. The PhD candidate will compare research conducted in different academic domains to address one or more of the following research questions:

- How are academics working in different domains responding to the research impact agenda?
- Does the peer review system that underpins Pathways to Impact for publicly-funded research consistently identify and support excellence?
- What value(s) are associated with high-quality engaged researchers?

**Methodology:**

The PhD could take a number of forms. We are interested in research that investigates how researchers from different academic domains are responding to the research impact agenda, therefore we are not proposing specific methodologies and methods in advance.

However, the research is likely to be informed by triangulation through mixed methods (e.g. Jensen and Holliman, 2009), and could draw on methodological approaches, such as participatory design or action research.

It is likely that the successful candidate will draw on a range of methods to collect data, which could include surveys, self-reporting, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and methods of systematic observation. It is not expected that applicants would have experience in all of these methods prior to starting the PhD. Training in research design, methods and analysis will be provided.

**Training and skills:**

You will join a vibrant international community of students studying our PhD programme with opportunities to develop your skills in engagement and communication (Holliman and Warren, 2017).

The Open University (OU) provides excellent support for students and offers a full range of training in social research methods, as well as computer, library and presentation skills.

**Partners and collaboration:**

The student will be supported by Professor Richard Holliman, Dr Lesley Hoggart and Dr Toni Gladding, all researchers at the Open University with considerable experience of studying forms of engaged research. The multi-disciplinary supervision team is drawn from researchers working in the Schools of: Environment, Earth and Ecosystems; Health, Well-being and Social Care; and Engineering and Innovation, respectively.

**Possible timeline:**

**Year 1:** The main activities will include training, pilot study research and write up for assessment in a probation review.

**Year 2:** You will spend your second year collecting and analysing data for your main study.

**Year 3:** In your final year you will complete your analysis and produce a thesis for examination.
Further reading:


Further details:

Please contact Richard Holliman (richard.holliman@open.ac.uk) for further information.

Applications must include:

• a cover letter outlining why the project is of interest and how your skills are well suited to the project
• an academic CV containing contact details of three academic references
• and an Open University application form.
• If you are resident in the UK or European Economic Area, please use the form downloadable here: https://tinyurl.com/y73hrfou
• If you are resident elsewhere, please use the form downloadable here: https://tinyurl.com/y836sgq4

Applications should be sent to STEM-EEES-PhD-Student-Recruitment@open.ac.uk by 12pm (noon) on 21st January 2019