

## The Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellows

Angie Daly  
Laura Grant Associates

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## Contents

Executive summary .....	2
1 Introduction .....	4
2 The Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowships .....	4
2.1 The Fellows .....	5
2.2 Fellows' existing public engagement interests .....	6
2.3 Becoming an Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellow .....	7
2.3.1 Recruitment .....	7
2.3.2 Motivations .....	7
3 Implementing the Fellowship .....	9
3.1 Facilitative approach .....	9
3.2 Time, funding and space for public engagement .....	11
3.3 Infrastructure for building capacity .....	12
3.4 Contributions from the Fellows .....	13
4 Impact of the Public Engagement Fellowships .....	14
4.1 Impact on professional practice .....	14
4.2 Recognition of public engagement expertise .....	15
4.3 Extending relationships with publics .....	16
4.4 Edinburgh Beltane contribution to Understanding public engagement .....	17
4.5 Opportunities to share learning and to collaborate .....	17
5 Discussion: Public Engagement Fellowships and change .....	19
5.1 Supporting and limiting contextual factors .....	19
5.2 Challenges to overcome .....	21
5.3 Strengths to take forward .....	21
5.4 The Public Engagement Fellowship: Beyond the Beacon? .....	22

## Executive summary

The Fellowship Scheme began in 2009 and will run until June 2012. This report draws on data gathered towards the end of the programme during November and December 2011. It is hoped this case study report will document the legacy of the Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowship and provide useful learning for the Beltane and others to take forward.

*In my opinion the fellowship scheme is one of the most successful things that the Beltane has done. And part of the success comes from that approach, it comes from the flexibility that it gives us because each of the fellows - we work in completely different worlds.*

The Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowship was **different by design** with several traditional and bespoke elements that combined to form a unique offer.

Bespoke elements of the fellowship included:

- A **facilitative approach** to encourage and support quality public engagement. Factors that contributed to this included trust and flexibility to develop ideas, building community among the Fellows and the capacity, skills and knowledge of the central team to support Fellows individually and as a group.
- **Dedicated time and space** of one day a week plus a hot desk to work at the Beltane offices. This provided various types work spaces: in company with other Fellows, away from Fellows' regular work, a quiet environment, a space to share ideas.
- An expectation to **champion public engagement while being championed** as Beltane Public Engagement Fellows. This meant Fellows were part of a broader community of public engagement practitioners working towards cultural change in areas such as reward and recognition.

Other more traditional elements provided **an infrastructure of support** including:

- Training and support including networking events. Many of these involved Fellows as recipients and contributors.
- Opportunities for reward and recognition such as prizes.
- Small amounts of additional funding for conference participation or additional activities.

Overall **the Beltane created conditions for impacts at various levels**. Impacts emerging from the Fellowships were expressed in two ways: personal impacts on professional practice and to a lesser extent impact on culture change.

*In my case it has made a massive difference to my career. I cannot say any more what was due to my publication or my teaching or what was due to my public engagement activities, so it's all linked. But I'm sure that the Fellowship itself has been a key factor - I've been very fortunate and had many opportunities in the last three years and I'm convinced that the Fellowship has been instrumental.*

Personal impacts emerging include:

- Impacts on professional practice in public engagement e.g. historical links, connections to public policy
- The context of reward and recognition impacting on professional esteem e.g. accepted conference papers on public engagement and joint inter-disciplinary research papers.
- Extending working relationships with publics e.g. collaborative work around respective research interests and working with partner organisations.

Culture change impacts emerging include:

- The broader Beltane context enhancing understanding of public engagement
- Supportive context enabling sharing of learning and collaborations

**Challenges remain for public engagement** and despite the success of the Fellowship, Fellows will find it a more constrained environment without the support of the Beltane. Issues raised as challenges include

- Research income taking priority over public engagement income
- Research output taking priority over public engagement activity with subsequent constraints on academics' time
- Despite work on formal recognition of public engagement in job descriptions, pressured culture to conform to traditional academic practice especially for early career researchers or for those employed on a contract basis
- Reaching people who are not already active; the Fellowship involved people who were already engaged
- Perception of limited Research Council funding for public engagement

As well as the challenges, **strengths to take forward** include:

- The Fellows themselves as advocates for public engagement
- Case studies of good quality public engagement by the Fellows
- Influence of senior academics who were Fellows
- Networks within networks; the Fellows community and their own public engagement communities in their projects or research groupings

**Suggestions were made by the Fellows as a contribution to thinking forward to beyond the Beacon.**

Fellows suggested ways to maintain their own involvement:

- Fellows to look for ways to continue to ensure networking among the Fellows and with the Beltane; by email at a minimum, face to face if possible
- Fellows to seek opportunities to champion the Edinburgh Beltane within their own universities as a group or individually, and to lever support for this internally
- Ensure case studies and learning from the Fellowships is accessible and discussed; via the website or via a special event.
- Use the learning from the Fellowships to demonstrate impact; improved research output, research funding, contact with broader publics, influence in public policy areas.

Fellows suggested ways to keep senior management involved:

- To promote the value of public engagement as part of the strategic role of universities
- To further promote public engagement as part of the impact section of the REF
- Make sure every flagship event involving senior academics in the next 12 months has a public engagement element to it

Fellows suggested ways to keep promoting public engagement

- Build on existing Engaging Scotland; Beltane has a national profile
- Seek Scottish Government Funding for public engagement across Scotland
- Promote the value and contribution of public engagement using the Fellows work as examples

## 1 Introduction

This report provides an account and analysis of the Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowship Scheme from implementation to impact. The Fellowship Scheme began in 2009 and will run until June 2012. This report draws on data gathered towards the end of the programme during November and December 2011. During this time in depth face to face or telephone interviews were conducted with ten of the existing Fellows. Additional material was reviewed as background information including Fellows web pages on the Edinburgh Beltane website and some Fellows' reports.

The design and implementation of the Fellowship is discussed in Sections 2 and 3. Evidence of the impact of the Fellowship including an evaluation of the supporting and limiting contextual factors for Fellowship is included in Section 4. In Section 5 an outline of strengths gained though the Fellowship plus remaining challenges is provided, which leads to a discussion of potential opportunities for any future Fellowship scheme beyond the end of the Beacon for Public Engagement funding.

It is hoped this report will document the legacy of the Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowship and provide useful learning for the Beltane and others to take forward.

## 2 The Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowships

The Fellowship Scheme began in 2009 as a way of fostering culture change for public engagement in the partner universities of the Edinburgh Beltane.

(<http://www.edinburghbeltane.net/content/public-engagement-fellowships>) Since June 2009, seventeen Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowships have been awarded spread among the university partners of the Edinburgh Beltane (see Figure 1). Initially interest in the Fellowship scheme was generated through individual discussions with potential Fellows. Gradually interest and applications for the Fellowship grew to a point where a panel was held to decide on which Fellowship applications to fund.

Out of the seventeen Fellowships:

- Fifteen academics successfully applied to the Fellowship Scheme
- Two academics have been appointed Honorary Public Engagement Fellows

- Seven Public Engagement Fellowships were awarded in 2009, four in 2010 and six in 2011
- At the time of the Fellowship award nine academics were at the University of Edinburgh; three academics were at Edinburgh Napier University; three academics were at Heriot Watt University; one academic was at Queen Margaret University and one academic was at the University of the Highlands and Islands.

	Edinburgh	Heriot Watt	Edinburgh Napier	Queen Margaret	UHI	Total Fellowships
<b>2009</b>	4	1	1	1	-	7
<b>2010</b>	2	1	1	-	-	4
<b>2011</b>	3	1	1	-	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>

**Figure 1: Spread of Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowships 2009-2011**

## **2.1 The Fellows**

The Fellows themselves come from a range of disciplines from across the universities although several respondents described themselves as inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary.

*I'm very highly interdisciplinary anyway, so I'm always meeting people from outside my field, so it's not an unusual thing for me. And I kind of – public engagement is a very blurred boundary for me, particularly in research. I do a lot of work which is on co-design and community creativity, so you're actually using end users who are for all intents and purposes, the public. So it's very natural for me to do that I think.*

They also have a range of levels of seniority in their research fields. Some are considered world experts and hold Chairs in their academic disciplines. Others consider themselves early career researchers and lecturers.

*I'm a linguist by training and I'm interested among other things in bilingualism. So I'm interested in children who learn two languages from birth, children who learn one language first and then another one as children, adults who learn a foreign language later on, so bilingualism in a broad sense. And I'm particularly interested in the cognitive aspects of bilingualism so language in the mind, language in the brain. So that's my area, my research area and also the title of my Chair is developmental linguistics.*

*I'd only been in the job in [university] for a couple of years or so and I wanted also to try and do something that would show that I was working hard and was interested in doing different things.*

A few were able to draw on considerable industry/public sector experience to inform their research and public engagement work.

*I don't have a conventional academic career path, you know, I worked in industry. And my attitude that the markets are the laboratory, that that is where the information*

*comes from, it doesn't come from the universities, it has been well sort of received beyond the [subject discipline] community...*

*I come from a practice background of working with children and young people and families and then in an education authority and then I came back to university to do a Masters in research and then decided to do a PhD. ... my interest in public engagement I suppose comes from working with the public...*

The Public Engagement Fellows' research interests represent a broad range of disciplines including multi-disciplinary areas. See Figure 2 below.

<b>Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental Linguistics</li> <li>• Language and Cultural Studies</li> <li>• Childhood Sociology</li> </ul>
<b>Science and Medicine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental Health and contemporary health challenges</li> <li>• Chemistry and Science at Extreme Conditions</li> <li>• Cell Biology</li> <li>• Environment and Biodiversity</li> <li>• Mathematical Physics and Astronomy</li> <li>• Immunology</li> <li>• Particle Physics</li> </ul>
<b>Business and Politics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Mathematics</li> <li>• Public Policy and decision making</li> </ul>
<b>Multi-disciplinary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social research in Science, Technology and Innovation</li> <li>• Computer Science and applied Psychology</li> <li>• Civil Engineering and Forestry Research</li> <li>• Cultural Informatics</li> <li>• Forensic Psychology</li> </ul>

**Figure 2: Range of research interests of Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellows 2009-2011**

## **2.2 Fellows' existing public engagement interests**

The Fellows had a wide variety of interests related to public engagement including:

- Developing public perceptions of their research area
- Making available specialist knowledge that would be useful for public policy development
- Ensuring their research supports communities
- Work with schools to enthuse young people about their research area
- Working collaboratively with other academics on public engagement

*A lot of my research involves action research so it kind of involves going out into the community and asking people within the community about what their experiences are and getting them involved. [We are] looking at ways to increase awareness about multilingualism and linguistic diversity... we put activities in place so that children could develop their awareness of language as well as their teachers and parents and at the same time we were doing research but we were giving something back to the community*

*I was also involved in a public engagement project called the Big Squeeze. The idea of this project was to encourage members of CSEC to communicate their science to well mainly to school kids and also to increase the awareness of central facilities, and it was funded by the STFC, so there was quite a focus on really highlighting the use of the central facilities.*

*The idea was to explore the cultural significance of informatics and not just informatics as a science and papers but exploring its relationship to culture and how it changes culture and how the culture interacts with it ... I do a lot of research with other colleagues in architecture or the art college particularly [with] practitioners, designers, dancers, jewellers, people like that, so a very broad theme.*

## **2.3 Becoming an Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellow**

### **2.3.1 Recruitment**

Interest in the Fellowships was generated in a number of ways. The Edinburgh Beltane team members were influential in recruiting Fellows through direct discussion with interested parties and by providing information at Beltane run events. During the early days of the Beltane, word of mouth was particularly important to explain and encourage applications for the Fellowship. Later on, as the Fellowship became more widely known, applications increased through the marketing channels of the website and email mail outs. Others were strongly encouraged by their managers who knew about the work of the Beltane. In the latter stages the existing Fellows played a role in promoting and encouraging applications to the Fellowship as an awareness of the potential and prestige of the Fellowships had already developed.

*Heather brought it to my attention and encouraged me to apply at the beginning. And I think very few people knew about it because the Beltane was also at the beginning. So you know, when Heather suggested this I thought well this sounds like an ideal possibility or opportunity for [my project] and I was lucky enough to get it.*

*It was our director of research [name] who saw the call for fellowships and he sent it round to people in his department and he said it to me that it would be – asked me if I'd be interested in applying for it because he knew I was already interested in public engagement work. So you know, I applied for it and that's just basically – he pointed it out to me.*

### **2.3.2 Motivations**

Fellows' motivations to apply for the Public Engagement Fellowship were varied and linked to their existing interest and experience. For some public engagement had been a long term interest and they had significant experience; for others recent experiences coincided with the opportunity of applying for the Fellowship and a way of building their research career.

*I thought that we had an obligation to share our research with a bigger audience, because the tax payer funds most of what we do, so we should be sharing our skills and our knowledge with more people. So then when I went to this Beltane presentation*

*obviously it was sort of right up my street because it's something that I genuinely think is a really, really good thing to do*

The Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowship was viewed as **distinct from other Fellowship awards**. The focus on public engagement with research; the local nature of the Fellowship; and the offer of training and support was attractive to awardees.

*I wanted to have a go at running my own project and I'd had two years working with [colleague] and he'd been really supportive working on [previous public engagement project] ... I was currently in research, again I was used to having that blend of one day a week and continuing with my research... if you're trying to introduce a cultural change within a department also being a contemporary, being a researcher too helps with encouraging your colleagues to try a bit of public engagement and communicate their research as well.*

Some of the more experienced Fellows identified the Fellowship as **an opportunity to progress existing work** through access to funded time and to consolidate the public engagement aspect of their work. It was also viewed as an opportunity to learn more about public engagement and get access to advice and support.

*I was one of the first batches of fellows. So the project was at the beginning; there was a lot of work to do. It was beginning to be clear that the project had a potential to expand although it hadn't expanded yet. And so I needed a lot of advice, I still need a lot of advice; I mean this is a very exciting prospect for me because I'm learning new things.*

For many of the respondents the role of the academic includes **a sense of academic duty** to explain to the public the purpose and basis of research, providing information on outcomes of publicly funded research and sharing research knowledge that would be useful to others not in academia.

*I think that as a scientist we have a duty to go out there and explain ourselves and justify what we do and have more contact and to communicate that our research is part of society and we are accountable and we should be out there exposed to interrogation and to – so yes, I feel really, really strongly about that, that it's a question of trying to coordinate having a very competitive job with making the time to do all these things properly.*

*The main thing for me was that I genuinely wanted to do something that I thought would be useful for groups who work with young offenders, because I know that they're struggling for funding as everybody is and I wanted to do something they would genuinely find useful and I also thought it would be interesting for me and that I would get to meet some people that were quite different to the people I worked with in the university.*

### 3 Implementing the Fellowship

The Beltane Public Engagement Fellowship was **different by design**. It had several elements that combined to form a unique offer. These included:

- A facilitative approach to encouraging and supporting quality public engagement.
- Dedicated time and space of one day a week plus a hot desk to work at the Beltane offices
- An expectation to champion public engagement while being championed as Public Engagement Fellow as part of the broader Beacon context

Other more traditional elements provided **an infrastructure of support** including:

- Training and support including networking events,
- Opportunities for reward and recognition such as prizes
- Small amounts of additional funding for conference participation or additional activities.

For those that were either new to receiving awards or new to public engagement all expressed the sense of community that the Edinburgh Beltane Fellowships garnered. These elements are discussed in more detail below.

*It's a very different project, so I think in a sense when I had other academic fellowships I knew what to expect and this is a familiar environment you know, familiar expectations and so on. With this it was a little bit different because I was new to public engagement, the Beltane was new, so it was all of a discovery I think.*

#### 3.1 Facilitative approach

The Fellows were a diverse group in terms of seniority and experience of receiving awards such as Fellowships. Those who had received research fellowships could see the difference in the support and engagement in the Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowship. Those for whom this was a first award did not have anything to compare with, but they found the experience very valuable as an early career researcher or a researcher exploring public engagement further.

*I'm fairly junior in the world of academia. I only got my first lectureship in 2007 at [University], so when I got my fellowship I'd only been there for three years and it was the first piece of funding I'd had. So this very involved experience is the only experience I'm familiar with and I've liked it and I've been glad of being able to get in touch with Heather so easily and hearing from her a lot and being able to arrange meetings with her easily. I've not found that that's sort of too involved or anything like that, I think it's been quite good.*

When asked about the nature of the facilitative approach promote by Edinburgh Beltane the Fellows spoke about a sense of belonging: being introduced to other Fellows, being kept in touch, and not being left to fend for yourself. Understanding the nature of the Beltane team as a facilitative resource was a key factor for engagement in the Fellowship scheme. Fellows

could draw on the central resource as much or as little as was possible or desired, and could get as much out of it as they wanted.

*I've actually quite liked it, because you always feel that there is stuff going on around the Beltane. It means that you don't just sort of leave it and don't bother with it, because you're always being asked to contribute things or being told about things that's going on, it keeps in your mind that you need to keep on with your bit of it as well.*

Being a champion and championing others was part of being an Edinburgh Beltane Fellow. Some of the Fellows had changed jobs during the Fellowship and had subsequently found it more difficult to feel their project was valued. This was especially true if they had previously had someone in the department who had acted as a mentor and encouraged public engagement work. For most, the idea of 'once a Beltane Public Engagement Fellow, always a Beltane Public Engagement Fellow' and the encouragement by the central team got them over any difficulties.

*I look up to people like Heather and Mary. Mary is such a great scientist, has an amazing career and look at her, how committed she is to all this and she is in a position where she can actually influence other people and so you look up to these people as role models but on the other hand you have all these other people in the department, students and other colleagues that are maybe more junior, that are looking up – or taking your example in order to start doing things themselves. So yes it is a very good approach, there's no doubt about that.*

For most the facilitative approach worked well. There was discussion about the extent to which each of the Fellows got involved with the Beltane. The flexibility afforded an opportunity to get involved more broadly with the Beltane and some felt there was a legitimate expectation on Fellows to do this. However as the quote below illustrates there was a sense that some Fellows made a smaller contribution to the Beltane than perhaps was expected by other Fellows or the core team.

*... when they created this space, gave us the flexibility and sort of trust us to do the best we can do in our own context ... maybe there's not much consistency in the contribution but that's the nature of the scheme. I mean I'm very junior, some of them are extremely senior, so yes, it was just bound to happen that some people didn't put as much effort into – but I still think they went the right way by doing it, in a way that was facilitative.*

Also for those with a comparative experience of other Fellowships, the facilitative approach of the Beltane Fellowships was both a welcome challenge and a useful support.

*They [Beltane team] always facilitated what I needed to have facilitated. [In comparison] the RCUK Fellowship did nothing. There was a big zero there! Okay they [Beltane team] didn't do things for me but then it's probably because that was – they wanted me to do it myself. It's no good me asking Heather or Lara or anybody else, Sarah or somebody, to do my job for me, it's all about me doing my job!*

### **Case study: Facilitative approach**

One of the Public Engagement Fellows gave a specific example of how the Beltane team had offered support in developing an event.

*I also found it very good that I had a number of meetings with Heather and Lara where, particularly in the beginning where I was trying to find my feet. And they were very good in coming up with ideas on how to move things forward, people I should be identifying. One of the things that they helped me with was this multilingual debate event that we hold in [university] every year and it had become a kind of a semi promotional recruitment type of event, even though initially it had started off as a public engagement event. So I tried to bring it back to more of a public engagement focus and I adapted one of the themes of the debate to my own research. So I got people debating about minority languages and the future of minority languages, so that was beneficial to hear two sides of the debate and to hear some reactions from teenagers about the issues.*

### **3.2 Time, funding and space for public engagement**

Each of the Fellows described different benefits from engagement in the Fellowship offer that included one day a week time, an option to avail of a desk at the Beltane offices and additional funding for specific activities.

For all of the Fellows having one day a week, for six months, funded by the Fellowship, even if nominally, went a long way to giving value to their public engagement work with peers and managers and in providing dedicated time for a project. The funding for 20% of their time allowed the Fellows to work in a more focussed way and to protect that time from their many other demands. It also allowed a flexibility to work outside one's usual academic and discipline boundaries including in other sectors.

*I just went in really when I wanted to have a chat with them. I worked mainly from home so I made sure that I stayed out of the university office so as not to be dragged into other unnecessary things. So I blocked out that one day and basically stayed off emails and worked from home. But I used it as well if I wanted to go out and visit different schools and different sectors or to meet people.*

The Edinburgh Beltane offices made available several hot desks to Fellows to enable them to work away from their usual workplace. Having a physical space to go as an option offered a place for peace and quiet or a space to interact, as well as to get advice and information from the Fellows and the Beltane team. This alternative space resulted in opportunities for discussion with the Beltane team and other Fellows contributing the sense of community as the quotes below illustrate.

*I think it was more about just a sense of belonging really and that other people were doing cool stuff ... it was just nice to know other people were doing stuff and their experiences and their difficulties. It just makes a space of things to think about.*

*I kind of enjoy just going to a different building and a different desk.*

For some the allocated time made little difference to their usual workload and some Fellows used their own time and resources for the Fellowship work. However, having the Fellowship made difference to recognition and awareness that they were doing public engagement as part of their academic work. For those not on permanent academic contracts the funding was a contribution rather than full-economic costing for the work.

*I'm on soft money, so I've got some fairly regular income from various things but my the majority of my salary has to be brought in by projects because if I'm not funded I can't do stuff. So I do try and in my own – in various ways, stimulate research relationships that lead to further projects and funding but I've only got a limited ability to do that. You've just got this lump sum really, so that just all went into basically paying for my time, but there were other expenses that I just paid for myself, like travel and accommodation when I was doing the actual capture So that really was the great thing about that was to be able to spend a lot more time than I would normally have been able to do to do something different.*

### **3.3 Infrastructure for building capacity**

The infrastructure of support was valued by the Fellows and helped Fellows build skills and capacity in areas they perhaps hadn't thought of before. Many Beltane events and training were cited by each of the Fellows as having an impact on them for building contacts and networks, building personal skills and for extending the possibilities for dialogue on their research in public policy arenas. Many Fellows mentioned they were events they would never have gone to or even heard about before. Some events and training were core Beltane activities, others were sourced and funded for individual Fellows to support their work. The core team skills in sourcing a diversity of training and their variety of communication methods (Twitter, website, emails and personal touch) provided individual encouragement and opened up many different learning opportunities for Fellows which was greatly appreciated.

Specific events and training highlighted as valuable included:

- Communication and confidence
- Dialogue and dealing with controversial issues in research
- Chairing meetings and presentations
- How to speak in public (Vox Coaching)
- Video training
- Communicating with new media
- Evaluating public engagement
- Narratives and storytelling (working with the media)
- Engaging Scotland (sustainability and wider horizons)

*We did training on presenting yourself and basically just like confidence and picking up on body language and techniques to start conversations, which you might otherwise find difficult to do with intellectual people.*

*I did the workshop on storytelling, the narrative workshop, a couple of weeks ago and that was excellent. And that's the sort of thing that I think the Beltane can do. That whole thing about up-skilling people, facilitating people.*

The range of contacts known to Fellows increased through the knowledge of the Beltane team, the networking events and in discussion with other Fellows. Specific outcomes included: building capacity in research funding applications with an emphasis on public engagement and impact planning; developing inter-disciplinary partnerships across the partnership and developing new avenues for dialogue about research.

*Well it's just you need help. I don't think you can do these things alone, you cannot create (an event) alone, you need to know people. Even if you create an event where do you get the public? I mean you need to know the ways you can get the public, the connections and all that. So if there's not a network behind it then it's very, very difficult and well time too, the more time you have, the better...*

### **Case study: developing skills**

One Fellow described how working with Beltane had been influential in preparing funding applications for public engagement.

*I didn't quite know what Beltane was and how it worked, so I think I got more than I expected. It's enabled me to write funding applications for example and learn how to do that because it's a different kind of funding application from the ones that I can do, I can apply for research grants, I have research grants, I can run those but it's a different type of application – you have to write it in a different way, you have to emphasise different factors and so it was useful to spend the time trying to understand how this different game works. Also how to deal with known academic organisations for example, how to deal with Trusts, understanding how these Trusts work, what they expect in an application. I remember spending quite a lot of the time in my Beltane fellowship trying to do that and getting advice from various people, why don't you try this Trust, look it up, see what it can – whether there is a match and so on.*

## **3.4 Contributions from the Fellows**

The Fellowship was meant to be a two way process enabling use of Fellows' expertise as well as supporting them. Contributions from the Fellows included existing experience particularly in working with the Media and policy makers on research relevant to public policy. Several Fellows already have existing contacts and experience of working with journalists and in public policy dialogue and were able to offer training and support in these areas to the Beltane community.

### **Case study: working with the media**

Approaches to working with the media were developed during the Fellowship as this Fellow describes.

*I'd done quite a bit of work with the media before this and I'd done an interview with the Times Higher about sort of talking to the media, because as you are probably well aware, a lot of academics don't really like to do that. I said in this interview that I thought it was a good thing to do and I was trying to encourage other people to do it and I said I thought that we had an obligation to share our research with a bigger audience, because the tax payer*

*funds most of what we do, so we should be sharing our skills and our knowledge with more people.*

*I now see it as a more collaborative thing whereas I think if your only experience of it is through sort of working with the media you're never on the other side of it, you're always just giving information or comments or things like that. I think that's important and I think if you can get sort of friendly terms with a journalist and have an agreement that it's not a hostile piece. And if a journalist is genuinely interested in something, I think if you take the time to talk to them they're not trying to make you look bad or make fun of what you're doing; they actually genuinely want to write about it. So I've done a bit of stuff about that.*

I think when I first started to get involved in doing this kind of thing, because it was very much done through the media it was a very one way process of me sort of sharing information with other people who were just recipients of it. And doing – getting the fellowship and going to a lot of the activities connected to the fellowship that Heather's organised and also through my own experience of it, has made me look at public engagement through the media as much more of a two way thing.

## **4 Impact of the Public Engagement Fellowships**

*In my case it has made a massive difference to my career. I cannot say any more what was the due to my publication or my teaching or what was due to my public engagement activities, so it's all linked. But I'm sure that the Fellowship itself has been a key factor in – I've been very fortunate and had many opportunities in the last three years and I'm convinced that the Fellowship has been instrumental.*

Impacts emerging from the Fellowships were expressed in two ways: personal impacts on professional practice and to a lesser extent impact on culture change.

Personal impacts emerging include:

- Impacts on professional practice in public engagement
- The context of reward and recognition impacting on professional esteem
- Extending working relationships with publics

Culture change impacts emerging include:

- The broader Beltane context enhancing understanding of public engagement
- Supportive context enabling sharing of learning and collaborations

These are discussed in more detail below.

### **4.1 Impact on professional practice**

The Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellowships had a number of impacts on individuals' professional practice including:

- A greater awareness and understanding of public engagement
- Extending quality of own public engagement practice
- Accepted conference papers on public engagement
- Joint inter-disciplinary research papers

- Extended scope of research interests e.g. historical links, links to public policy
- Improved skills in explaining and communicating own research to a range of people including writing for public engagement
- Negotiated additional time for public engagement in Department
- Personal impacts including confidence in public speaking and networking with new people
- Developmental impact on academic career
- Broadening knowledge of what other Departments are doing in public engagement

*It's changed the way in which I talk about my research and I tell people about my research and not just lay people, researchers. I use that all the time when I teach to postgraduates and the results have been – their response has been amazing.*

*I've been quite interested in looking at the way that the scientists approach public engagement and yes and the way that they're making I suppose their theories or whatever much more accessible to people. I think that I suppose it's made me think a bit more about how we as social scientists can do that because in many ways we are good and have – and particularly those of us who come from a professional background, we know how to work with the public*

### **Case study: Fellowships and impact**

The value of the Fellowship in terms of prestige and capacity building is illustrated by this Fellow.

*I think there are benefits because you know, it is a great honour to get a fellowship and I suppose it means then that you know, it's giving you the label of having a public engagement fellowship and it's very useful for the image that you portray and as well as that for follow up research applications because I just made an application last year and there was a huge section about impact. So one of the things I was able to talk about was the fact that I was given a public engagement fellowship and that I had spend six months doing public engagement activities. It shows that you know, that I was capable of doing it and any plans that I had for the future had that kind of solid background and training.*

## **4.2 Recognition of public engagement expertise**

The context of the Beltane provided a space where academics could be recognised for their public engagement expertise as Fellows. While the funding certainly helped recognition from managers and peers, the status of being a Public Engagement Fellow was useful in exploring or accessing new avenues and building professional esteem. All of the Fellows valued the opportunity and commented on the benefit to their research:

*Having the possibility of saying I got this in my job description and that I'm a Public Engagement Fellow, from my perspective has opened lots of doors, because before I was just a senior scientist that likes to do this on the side but now I have a title and I try to use it as much as possible so that people see I'm serious about this, this is happening, it's part of what I do. And not only I spend lots of time on the microscope and teaching, I do this and I think it's very important.*

However some of the Fellows did feel there may be a possible adverse effect on their career development especially as it took time away from working on publications as expressed by the quotes below.

*I'm a bit still scared about what the consequences for my career will be but I'm very committed now to this.*

*I think that it's still seen as maybe a lesser achievement in terms of award, a public engagement fellowship, as opposed to a research fellowship.*

### **4.3 Extending relationships with publics**

The Fellowships have meant Fellows have extended relationships with a wider range of publics than they had before. Publics include industry, community groups, politicians, and the general public. Working as a Fellow meant sometimes pushing the boundaries of what is expected and understood by public engagement both within and without academia.

*It did put me in a spot where I could bring some of my own research and some of my own concerns as a public engagement fellow to policy arenas. Also it made me much more aware of the barriers because certain realities of knowledge within academia and certain privileges and status quo exist that make it very difficult for senior academics to understand the ethics of engagement. And that very structure reproduces itself in all these arenas.*

Fellows used a variety of mechanisms to engage publics including

- Themed conferences and events
- Celebration of themed years
- Accessing research workshops for community groups and non-specialists
- Commercial events
- Design showcase events open to buyers
- On-line communities
- Public fora such as the Scottish Futures Forum

#### **Case study: two way communication**

One of the Fellows described the importance of two way communication to enable access to research and researchers by the community.

*I think it's been useful for people for their own projects and their own interventions that they're doing. I think they've found it useful and I hope that I've made them much more aware of where to look for new research as well instead of just waiting for it to come out in a text book or something and I've made them much more aware of where they can find stuff out and be a bit more engaged themselves. I think it's made a difference to those people directly.*

#### **4.4 Edinburgh Beltane contribution to Understanding public engagement**

The Edinburgh Beltane has made a contribution to a broader understanding of public engagement. For some of the Fellows, the emphasis on public engagement only relating to science was helpfully debunked; although that view still prevails in some areas. For others it was the full breadth of public engagement activity that was a useful learning context to be working in.

*it was interesting to realise that the Beltane wasn't only concerned with the popularisation of science, which is the most obvious kind of public engagement and what most people would understand by public engagement right? In a sense my work is in between because the kind of linguistics we do is on the scientific side, on the experimental side, so but I think there's much more to public engagement than just popularising science and as last night [Annual Gathering event] it was very clear right? I mean the range of projects. So it was good to see there was a whole range of projects ranging from the hard science to the more social and educational projects. So those meetings were useful I thought.*

In addition the Beltane supported the Fellows to think about understanding public engagement from the publics' points of view, rather than the universities' point of view, and how to use the Fellows' own experiences with various publics to get the most out of the project.

*They were very supportive and I had some good talks with Heather. Some of the work that I was trying to do was quite complicated and therefore there wasn't really anything that anybody could help with. It was just you know, organisational structures within the local authority and yeah those were the main difficulties but certainly Heather really helped with just talking through things and what it was that I was trying to focus on. One needs to think about how much you do need to know, to be doing that for the general public. So these are the sorts of things that have made me – Beltane's made me think a bit more about– who we're trying to engage and what we're trying to engage them with.*

*I can't remember what I thought Beltane do. I think I probably thought it might tell me a bit more about what public engagement was because I was finding it very difficult for anybody to actually be able to describe it in a meaningful manner. I guess I was also aware at the time I think it's called the typography of public engagement, you know, first of all public understanding of science, which is shout louder, and then there's science communicate, which is not to shout so much and then public engagement.*

#### **4.5 Opportunities to share learning and to collaborate**

The supportive context allowed Fellows to engage in a broader community of practice than their regular research groups. Fellows had the opportunity to come together and talk about their projects either through the informal networking in the Beltane offices, or more public presentations and giving an update about what they had been doing and the issues arising. Some of the Fellows contributed to panel discussions at Beltane events and have benefited from the broader range of political and public policy networks this had brought them into

contact with. Many of the Fellows value the website and would like to continue to share resources they have created or access other information that way.

*One thing I'd like to do is obviously write up what we did and put the resources online, now that we know that the activities worked well it would be relatively simple to run again I think. The only training I've offered so far was this video course that was run as part of the Beltane Fellowship and I suppose some of the wiki pages are basically – there's guides to what can be done, so the idea of the wiki was that I'd set it up and then it can be added to by other members of [research team] as they discover new things, so it grows over time.*

*I got talking to people from the Scottish parliament, from the museums and I found it useful in that it was a kind of a brainstorming event and people – they were bouncing ideas off each other and I kept in contact with some people and it means that I have – it developed my network really.*

### **Case study: new opportunities for dialogue**

Fellows benefited by different opportunities for dialogue around research relevant to public policy as described by this Fellow.

*[At] first I was very much focussed on an educational context and I suppose I felt kind of comfortable within that and I know the first part of the fellowship I did find it hard to move outside that particular context because it was all new terrain. One thing that I was involved in quite early in the fellowship was Beltane organised – it was part of a BSL [British Sign Language] initiative where there was an event at the parliament. So Beltane actually got me to talk about my research and how it would relate to linguistic diversity in the context of BSL. So I thought that was a great opportunity because it brought me into contact with people within the BSL community and it kind of allowed me to give an overview of what I was doing.*

### **Case study: flexibility to collaborate**

Two of the Fellows developed mutual work around their respective research interests and worked with a partner organisation to create a vibrant public engagement experience.

*We ran an event at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh called Chemistry (of Autumn). So we were celebrating ... International Year of Chemistry this year. And it's International Year of Forests as well and [another Fellow] is a wood engineer and I'm a chemist and so it was really good to meet somebody who was also celebrating an international year and it seemed a good opportunity so we did a joint event which went really well, really successful actually. It was the last weekend of the October break and we had I think about 300 to 400 people on the Saturday and about 200 to 300 on the Sunday and it was a family drop in event, so lots of different activities linking, explaining the colours of autumn basically.*

*The Chemistry of Autumn was great because we had 10 volunteers each day, some of them had done quite a bit of public engagement but some of them hadn't really done any and I'm getting some good feedback from them too. So yeah, I think just and having something like that where they don't need to commit for very long but can come in for a couple of hours and then just give them some experience of it worked really well. And certainly from the*

*public's point of view the feedback we got back they said they really enjoyed meeting all the enthusiastic scientists and actually being able to chat to scientists and for us so it was a really good mix.*

## **5 Discussion: Public Engagement Fellowships and change**

Much of the work in the Beacons has shown that culture change is expressed differently depending on location in organisations and previous experiences of public engagement (even if known by other names). The same is true for the Fellows; as referred to earlier all of them had some experience of what they would call public engagement to draw on. In respect of the Fellowship scheme's impact on culture change it appears that it has been useful to highlight the value public engagement through Fellows own practice and experiences.

*There is already a culture here and so therefore it is quite difficult to say how much it's actually changed. I think it has – me having the Fellowship has highlighted it.*

The following sections indicate aspects of the Fellowship experience to bear in mind if planning similar work, including supporting and limiting contextual factors. For future public engagement Fellowships challenges remain; however there are many positives to be taken forward. The section ends with suggestions from Fellows themselves for continuing the work 'beyond the Beacon'.

### **5.1 Supporting and limiting contextual factors**

The Fellowship resulted in many positive outcomes for the Fellows themselves. However, Fellows had varying success in influencing others' practice in public engagement in their own departments, across the university or partnership. There are several supporting and limiting factors that influenced the extent of impact.

Factors supporting Fellowship influence more broadly included:

- Existing departmental interest and support for the Public Engagement Fellowship
- Management commitment to public engagement
- Support from a mentor
- The Fellow's profile in department affected the extent of influence. This was not always linked to seniority but included Fellows' existing expertise in public engagement.

#### **Case study: Fellow as a catalyst**

This Fellow used the Fellowship experience within their own department to catalyse ideas and activity around public engagement.

*There are so many people that have a certain affinity for these types of activities; they would like to contribute somehow. They either don't have the time or they don't have the knowledge or know how to contribute or how to organise it. If there's somebody doing, there's somebody asking for grants, there's somebody organising activities and you just go and say look we are doing this, would you be interested? I know who can provide the*

*resources, the pictures, the movies, who would be good at organising children, who would be good at – so it's a question of almost being in the middle there, promoting and catalysing things. Like a mini Beltane but in the department.*

Factors that meant Fellowship influence was minimal included:

- Strong existing Department or Centre practice in public engagement that meant Fellowship was not seen as a 'special opportunity'
- Consistency in employment (Fellows employed on project funded basis, moved jobs)
- Fellowship seen as Fellow's own work, not a priority of Department
- Limited funding for public engagement activity
- Professional development priorities including writing papers, conferences and the REF

*In order to sustain it I have to spend time on it and in order to raise money I have to spend time applying, so yes I have the support of my group but they're all you know, people at the beginning of their career or building their career. So I can't impose this or I can't tell them to give priority to this because they have their papers to write, they have their conferences to go to and that has to have priority for them.*

*I don't think it's changed the way my institution works and I think it's changed the way I work for the better. This grant application that I'm doing again I don't think would have happened had I not done a lot of its following on from my Beltane work as a way of getting more funding to do the same.*

### **Case study: extending public policy networks**

One of the Fellows described how working with other Fellows enhanced existing networks in areas of research relevant to public policy.

*One of the first meetings I was at was with all the fellows so it gave me an opportunity to introduce myself and to get to know who they were. And there were one or two people who I have remained in contact with who are doing similar things to me... As part of the Fellowship I am organising an event - it's a small enough event initially - we're hoping for about maybe 20 to 30 people. The idea then is to develop a language policy network because there's a ... policy network within Edinburgh University and within it there is no language component ...*

*Within our department a lot of people are actually involved in public engagement activities but I suppose like myself have never really made it that explicit. So I have had a number of talks within the department on public engagement and hopefully have influenced them in some sort of way. Some of the people in the department are going to be involved in the event I'm organising as well.*

*I've also set up a blog for the department, where we put our news of the department on and hopefully I'm trying to make people aware of the fact that it's a good forum to get people engaged so that like I've had examples from other colleagues in other parts of the schools who use the blog to actually recruit people for research projects or to get feedback from them on his own research. So he engages very much with the public through his blog. So I'm trying to maybe develop that culture within the department as well.*

## **5.2 Challenges to overcome**

Challenges remain for public engagement and despite the success of the Fellowship, Fellows will find it a more constrained environment without the support of the Beltane. Issues raised as challenges included:

- Research income taking priority over public engagement income
- Research output taking priority over public engagement activity with subsequent constraints on academics' time
- Despite work on formal recognition of public engagement in job descriptions, pressured culture to conform to traditional academic practice especially for early career researchers or for those employed on a contract basis
- Reaching people who are not already active; the Fellowship involved people who were already engaged
- Perception of limited Research Council funding for public engagement

*[The] big drive is all about money. Everything that we get asked to do has to generate money and there's actually a constant message coming through of don't do things that don't make money, don't do stuff just because it's interesting or you think it's a good idea - that's a waste of time, it's all about money. So my line manager is very supportive but it's the people that are senior to her that actually don't really value it. They say they do because they know that they're supposed to but the actual message from them on a day to day basis is that it's not important unfortunately.*

The biggest challenge – funding - remains for public engagement activity; for the Edinburgh Beltane and for individual Fellows. Leadership and political will are key to any future significant funding. At institutional and departmental levels, the place of public engagement among research priorities and research funding will shape its future.

*There isn't much money going around and it's true and in a sense you know, it's a bad time to – well to fight this battle, but you have to start from somewhere and we're not talking about necessarily about huge investments here. I mean but there has to be a political will to see the importance of these changes.*

*in the end the real test is going to come after June when the major [Beltane] budget disappears, the major structure disappears and we are left as individuals who have had a massive support network for a long time and now we'll be in some sense left to battle in our own contexts, which as I say in many cases are hostile*

## **5.3 Strengths to take forward**

The Fellowship has generated a lot of goodwill and leaves a legacy of strengths. Primarily these are embodied in the Fellows themselves, but have been made possible because Edinburgh Beltane created the conditions for a vibrant Fellowship and has been open to learning as part of the process.

Strengths to take forward include:

- The Fellows themselves as advocates for public engagement
- Case studies of quality public engagement by the Fellows
- Influence of senior academics who were Fellows
- Networks within networks; the Fellows community and their own public engagement communities in their projects or research groupings

*A term they've started to use lately, champion ... the idea of somebody that really does speak up about this is a good thing to do and has experience of it as well. We get a lot of people in the university who are "champions" or experts, telling everyone else to do something when they won't do it themselves or haven't done it themselves. I think to have people that have done this and have got a good experience of it as well, because you'll always find people that say oh I spoke to the newspapers and they made me look like a fool or I'm not doing that. I think if you've got people that have done this and it has worked in a good way for them, I think that's probably the best kind of endorsement you can get, someone that's been there and done it.*

*Beltane has realised towards the end that there's a political dimension to all of this and now this year we are doing a lot in policy areas and having policy conversations and some of that could have begun earlier. But at the same time I understand that the focus was more on traditional sort of engagement, so it was a learning process for everyone.*

#### **5.4 The Public Engagement Fellowship: Beyond the Beacon?**

*In my opinion the fellowship scheme is one of the most successful things that the Beltane has done. And part of the success comes from that approach, it comes from the flexibility that it gives us because each of the fellows - we work in completely different worlds.*

Finding funding is one of the biggest challenges facing the Edinburgh Beltane but the Fellows insist that the Fellowship is good value for money and had significant impact. The existing Fellows are a resource for the Beltane in the next few months and beyond the Beacon. The following recommendations were suggested by the Fellows:

Fellows suggested ways to maintain their own involvement:

- Fellows to look for ways to continue to ensure networking among the Fellows and with the Beltane; by email at a minimum, face to face if possible
- Fellows to seek opportunities to champion the Edinburgh Beltane within their own universities as a group or individually, and to lever support for this internally
- Ensure case studies and learning from the Fellowships is accessible and discussed; via the website or via a special event.
- Use the learning from the Fellowships to demonstrate impact: improved research output, research funding, contact with broader publics, influence in public policy areas.

*One of the RCUK's hundred big ideas came out of their funding. You know, it wasn't a £5 million research grant from the research councils, it was £5,000 from Beltane and it was one of the hundred big ideas this year. And that's big news – people spend a lot of money to get those things and I think it's changed the way I work.*

Fellows suggested ways to keep senior management involved:

- To promote the value of public engagement as part of the strategic role of universities
- To further promote public engagement as part of the impact section of the REF
- Make sure every flagship event involving senior academics in the next 12 months has a public engagement element to it

*I've already spoken to Heather a bit about this. I know that she's trying to get sort of public engagement champions or people that particularly speak up for it within their universities and I think that's probably a good idea. I mean it's something that I wouldn't mind being involved in if I was asked to do it, so I think that's one way of doing it*

Fellows suggested ways to keep promoting public engagement

- Build on existing Engaging Scotland; Beltane has a national profile
- Seek Scottish Government Funding for public engagement across Scotland
- Promote the value and contribution of public engagement using the Fellows work as examples

*It's a culture thing, I don't think people do things – they do it partly for the money or for status or for getting on with your job, but I think a lot of why you do things is because of the values you hold and if you've got particular values which see public engagement as part of an informed and educated technically advanced society, then I think that follows automatically that you do it. So to make that argument that it isn't just a little bit of something on the side it's something that's core to the values of academia and then I think that'll make it better and easier for people to do it.*

*If we can keep some of the contacts that we have made in policy networks in Scotland. And if we keep those contacts and to still do things with them and try to carve our niches in various policy areas. So it's about leaving – it's not a legacy of – it's a legacy of doors open, that sort of thing.*