**From Engagement to Strategy: The Journey Towards a Civic University.**

**Nicola Gratton**

## **Abstract**

Between 2002 and 2018, at a time when UK universities were being increasingly measured in economic and financial terms, Staffordshire University established a dedicated public engagement unit. Staffed by an experienced team of ‘pracademics’ (Posner, 2009), the Creative Communities Unit engaged with community members and voluntary organisations through teaching, research, and consultancy. Underpinning CCU practice was a clear set of principles influenced by those of community development, including participation, inclusion, and action driven practice. However, despite strong community connections the work of the unit remained isolated with little coordination for public engagement at a strategic level in the university.

This chapter charts the work of the CCU over its lifespan and its influence on a strategically embedded Connected Communities Framework through which civic engagement is supported across the institution. It explores how the alignment of grass roots activity through the CCU, shifts in UK policy and a clear, institutional strategic vision for civic engagement enabled the move from public engagement as a small team activity to an institutional commitment. It concludes with a reflection on the enabling conditions that supported the journey towards a civic university.

## **Introduction**

Universities do not operate in a vacuum. They influence, and are influenced by, their place, its people and its economy (Brennan et al., 2018). In the current neoliberal context of higher education in the UK, the demand for universities to maximise their economic return on investment has overridden their potential social value (Brink, 2018). However, with recent calls for universities to contribute to the public good (Brackmann, 2015; Brink, 2017) and the timely publication of Truly Civic (UPP Foundation, 2019a), universities are prioritising their civic roles and their social impact on the geographies in which they are based. The implementation of civic engagement and prioritisation of social good in the current financial and political climate, however, is not necessarily straightforward with universities experiencing a broad range of challenges in embedding meaningful civic engagement for the benefits of stakeholders and regions.

This chapter presents Staffordshire University as a case study, charting the civil commitments and public engagement activity of the university over time, from the development of a dedicated, but isolated, Creative Communities Unit (CCU) in 2002 to the development of a strategically embedded Connected Communities Framework in the present day. The founding principles and practices of the CCU approach that have continued to influence the development of the current framework are outlined, in addition to exploring how a new strategic civic commitment within the university, combined with recent policy developments in UK higher education sector, together created conditions for the Connected Communities Framework to be embraced at strategic and operational levels.

The UPP Foundation (2019a) argue that UK universities have been dismissive of the cities and towns in which they are based, operating as relatively well-resourced global institutions in economically disadvantaged areas, reinforcing perceptions of universities as impenetrable to most local people. These widening divides, if not addressed, will have a detrimental effect on universities and places by reducing the potential for social mobility, public empowerment, and the relevance of universities to the areas in which they are based (UPP Foundation, 2019a).

Since the early 2000s, UK higher education sector policy has emphasised the social responsibilities of universities to their localities (Jorge, 2017; NCCPE, 2018a). The implementation of a Knowledge Exchange Framework, announced in 2017, is expected to include metrics on research partnerships, and public, third sector, and community engagement, providing a means of recognising the social contributions universities make to their civic regions (Research England, 2019). Furthermore, the growth of the National Coordinating Centre Public Engagement (NCCPE) since its inception in 2008 also highlights an increased focus on the social value of universities through public engagement, which is “by definition, a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit” (NCCPE, 2018b, para.2). Parallel to these developments the Research Excellence Framework has increasingly emphasised the need for research to demonstrate “the ‘reach and significance’ of impacts on the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life that were underpinned by excellent research” (REF 2021, 2019, p. 7). This drive towards demonstrable impact has highlighted the potential significance of public engagement for many universities, particularly in the realm of research. Despite these developments, UK universities continue to be assessed predominantly on their economic impact on graduates and the experience of students whilst studying, with little means of reporting on their wider social impact (Department for Education, 2019a).

The UPP Foundation (2019a) report, Truly Civic, was published in response to political, ideological, and economic tensions faced by UK universities. It presents a series of recommendations to support the civic roles of universities including the development of Civic University Agreements based on a deep understanding of place and its communities, measuring and incentivising civic activity, building networks for sharing good practice raising aspirations and attainment, and supporting adult education. Around one third of UK universities have signed a commitment to observe the recommendations of the Truly Civic report (UPP Foundation, 2019b) demonstrating the largely welcoming reception of the report, the emphasis it places on the social value of universities and the challenge it brings to the existing economic and political landscape that diametrically opposed such value since the late 1990s (Ally & Smith, 2004; Brink, 2018). However, while offering strong support for the case to be made at a local and national level, the report alone cannot create the conditions for universities to become ‘truly civic.’ A combination of enabling factors need to be in place to ensure practice and strategy are aligned and complimentary. These additional enabling factors, and the necessary alignment of national and institutional policy are illustrated through the introduction of the case study herein.

## **The Creative Communities Unit at Staffordshire University**

Staffordshire University is based in Stoke-on-Trent, a city with a population of around 250,000 in the West Midlands in the UK. Stoke-on-Trent has a rich history of pottery and mining industries, and despite a resurging cultural sector in the city many of its residents are feeling the effects of post-industrial decline. It is the 14th most deprived city in England with high levels of child poverty (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019). In some areas of the city less than 20% of young people go on to higher education (Department for Education, 2016) compared to a UK national average of 50% (Department for Education, 2019b).

With its origins firmly based in addressing local needs for skilled miners and pottery workers in the early 20th century, Staffordshire University has a long history as an educational establishment based at the heart of its local community. It has, for many years, recognised its social and economic responsibilities and engaged with local people for the purposes of widening participation and to maintain relationships with people living nearest to the university campus, including subject specific family days, school outreach and community engagement with research. Equally, academic staff have forged strong links with local employers, third sector organisations, and members of the public to both inform teaching and research and to provide real world opportunities for their students. However, until recently this work has been largely uncoordinated at a strategic level. Therefore, in order to illustrate the journey towards a civic university this case study focuses on the work of one team with a specific remit to engage with local communities and how this work evolved over time to inform the current Connected Communities Framework.

Staffordshire University established the CCU in 2002 which operated until 2018. The CCU was staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of community practitioners and academics with a broad range of specialisms, including community development, youth and community work practice, policy development, regeneration, mentoring and coaching, and community arts. Most core staff had extensive experience as practitioners in their subject specialism and therefore brought with them networks, principles, and practices, which helped to build the reputation of CCU as a grounded unit. This close relationship between the unit and community representatives formed a strong element of CCU’s identity throughout its lifespan. These connections with communities are evident through the three areas of CCU’s practice: teaching, consultancy, and research. Each of these will be discussed.

### Teaching

Initially, CCU delivered postgraduate awards reflecting the subject specialisms of the team and demands from local public and voluntary sector employers, including taught programmes in community practice, community arts, and youth and community work. The block teaching format made courses attractive to mature, part-time students who were employed in the local public and voluntary sectors. As the financial impact of the banking crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures imposed in the UK in 2010 impacted on the sustainability of the larger postgraduate awards, CCU reviewed the programmes on offer. A series of short courses were developed, which acted as an access point for non-traditional learners to Staffordshire University. They were offered to community groups, organisations, and individuals and, being developed through externally funded projects, were often free to learners.

All short courses were “practical, fun, creative and provided skills needed to further develop the work of organisations” (Emadi-Coffin, 2008, p. 32); they were also designed to build the practical and academic confidence of the participants themselves. Students enrolled on these short courses were able to gain a university certificate of credit at either postgraduate, undergraduate, or foundation levels. Crucially, the courses offered a further link to community practice; all courses had a practical element through which students were able to connect with local community members and organisations.

### Consultancy

In addition to delivering short courses, CCU engaged in a broad range of consultancy activities. Given the reduction in postgraduate awards, consultancy provided an alternative income for the CCU. However, the benefits of engaging in consultancy activities went beyond financial. Engaging in practice brings academic credibility through an appreciation of changing contexts and improving the relevance of research for practice (Elliott & Wall, 2008) and is vital for students’ ability to engage with their intended audience, supporting development of practitioners through engagement with theory (Posner, 2009). Consultancy opportunities included delivery of an annual community festival, community organising, peer mentoring programmes, evaluations, social value assessments, group facilitation, and tailored short courses.

CCU also partnered with organisations to work on strategically significant, locally delivered projects, such as Appetite, a large-scale Arts Council England funded programme, for which CCU was the evaluating consortium partner (Gratton, 2014). A further example was a Local Authority partnership, for whom CCU delivered a custom-built training and mentoring programme to disseminate a new strategic vision and policy to operational staff. CCU projects, therefore, offered not only local engagement activities, but also actively contributed to leadership of local civic activity and regeneration, building strong connections and long-term relationships between CCU and partner organisations.

### Research

Consultancy provided CCU with the opportunity to undertake applied research in a variety of settings. Community consultation and evaluations adopted participatory methods through which new local knowledge was coproduced, often utilising creative approaches to maximise the opportunity for people with lower literacy levels to participate (Kara, 2015). While most research commissions were small-scale with a city or regional focus, the subject areas of the commissioned work were broad. These included a participatory consultation in the areas immediately surrounding the university which identified improvements needed to the local area as perceived by the residents (Vincent, 2010). The findings from this consultation informed the development of a group that went on to secure significant heritage funding for the refurbishment of a local park. Other research projects included a social value forecast for Stoke-on-Trent’s bid to be City of Culture 2021 (Gratton & Jones, 2016), a coproduced participatory action research project identifying how mainstream cultural sector organisations can provide better access for people with learning disabilities (Gratton & Corcoran, 2018), and a Family Arts Campaign funded participatory research project to develop content guidance for family arts events (Hetherington, 2015).

Through their programmes of engaged and applied research, CCU staff were successful in achieving positive impact outside academia with valuable outcomes for commissioning organisations, participants, and beneficiaries. However, the engagement did not always translate into academic outputs. The high value placed on participation and transparency resulted in priority being given to clearly communicated and accessible findings, rather than academic papers or outputs. The team managed a broad portfolio of short-term projects and needed to sustain the work of CCU through continual income generation. This financial pressure, combined with a lack of strategic positioning within the university, resulted in under-realised potential for research conducted by the CCU team to contribute to the university’s research agenda through published research outputs.

## **The Principles of CCU**

The work of CCU reflected the practice backgrounds of the core staff team, specifically community development, youth work, and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) (Clarke, 2011; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Their approaches exemplified some of the key principles outlined in the Kellogg Commission on the future of Land Grant universities in the United States of America (McDowell, 2003; UPP Foundation, 2019a) such as the requirement for universities to be responsive to community need, respect community partners, and offer accessible opportunities. These influences developed into a series of principles that underpinned CCU practice and shaped engagement with communities. Each principle, and its influence on practice, is explored.

### Participation

A key principle of CCU teaching and practice was that participation has potential for transformative change (Arnstein, 1969; Ledwith & Springett, 2010). CCU aimed to find ways of encouraging meaningful and active participation in the design and delivery of a broad range of projects, courses, and activities. Based on the assumption that communities and members of the public are asset rich (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003), coproduced knowledge was considered a useful means for redressing inequalities between universities and communities (Cohen et al, 2017), and therefore community encounters were based on an understanding that all parties were both generators and recipients of new knowledge.

Participation, if done well, is time- and resource-intensive and therefore tensions with income generation targets were increasingly apparent. However, despite these financial pressures, participatory practice was encouraged throughout all CCU activity. Research involved community members as researchers. Students were encouraged to actively engage in taught sessions and influence their own learning and assessment and commissioned work involved both commissioners and their service users in project design. To build capacity, students and community representatives were encouraged to work with CCU as associate lecturers and researchers, further embedding CCU activities into the communities they served.

### Inclusion

Social justice and equality are core principles of community development, youth work, and asset-based community development, all of which make the case for proactive and purposeful challenge to societal inequality. However, it was clear that as a university-based unit, the CCU was less accessible to some sections of society than others. Non-traditional higher education learners were difficult to engage with due to perceptions of university being an exclusive environment. To overcome this CCU took a deliberative, inclusive stance to their approach to working with communities, building relationships and providing flexible opportunities.

#### Relationships

Building positive relationships with communities is a fundamental principle of youth work and community development (Batsleer & Davies, 2010; Jeffs & Smith 2010). With low levels of higher education engagement amongst communities within Stoke-on-Trent, and a high level of skepticism in its relevance to the average person in cities such as Stoke-on-Trent (UPP Foundation, 2019a), CCU actively worked with people who were unlikely to engage with higher education. For many people, especially those with no experience of higher education, CCU teaching, consultancy and research projects provided their first opportunity to engage with a university and its staff, helping to open an otherwise perceived impenetrable university façade. In addition to positive relationships with communities, CCU staff also built an informal network of staff from across the university who were interested in community engagement activities. This virtual network was sent updates of community engagement activity and shared good practice.

#### Flexibility

Wherever possible CCU engagement was taken at the pace of the people involved (Jeffs & Smith, 2010; Ledwith & Springett, 2010). Following the principles of differentiation (Petty, 2004) CCU short courses and other projects were designed to enable a diverse group of learners to engage. For example, for some short course participants, a foundation level qualification proved too intimidating or challenging, and therefore, students were encouraged to engage in the course as a non-accredited learning opportunity. This approach was particularly helpful for engaging people with learning disabilities and people with low English literacy skills. Students of different academic abilities therefore shared class sessions which created learning communities through which students were able to offer experiences, perspectives, and support to others while gaining from learning alongside people different to themselves (Gratton & Beddows, 2018).

### Action driven

“Collective action for social change” (Ledwith & Spingett, 2010, p. 14) was a key driver for much of CCU’s practice. Teaching, consultancy, research, and wider internal and external relationships were undertaken with the intention of engaging with others to create societal change, in particular in relation to inequality and inclusion. For example, CCU supported a fire and rescue service to conduct a creative consultation through which young people were able to inform the fire and rescue services’ children and young people’s policy (Gratton & Beddows, 2018) and helped more community members to engage with the Centre for Health and Development (CHAD), a partnership between Staffordshire University and Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire local authorities (CHAD, 2019).

## **Get Talking: Principles into Practice**

Participatory action research (PAR) is an approach to research which places people most affected by the subject area at the heart of the research process as trained and supported community researchers (McIntyre, 2008). Participatory research therefore “is primarily differentiated from conventional research in the alignment of power within the research process” (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995, p. 1668) and addresses power imbalances between researchers and the ‘researched’ (Walter, 2009). Get Talking, an approach to PAR developed and adopted by CCU in collaboration with Kate Gant of Creative Health CIC, utilises the core principles underpinning CCUs work and places emphasis on the use of creative engagement techniques to reach people often under-represented as community researchers and research participants (Gratton & Beddows, 2018). Community researchers are supported through the whole research process, from planning to dissemination and implementation of actions based on findings.

Get Talking illustrates the interconnected relationship between CCU’s principles and teaching, research, and consultancy. Get Talking was initially developed as taught course for a local community-based organisation in 2004 (Emadi-Coffin, 2008). Although designed as a short course, the approach was adopted as the methodology for much of the practice of CCU, becoming synonymous with the unit. The practice of recruiting teams of community researchers to work as partners with CCU staff and commissioners to deliver projects was commended by local organisations and community members alike, and flexibility was demonstrated with pragmatic adaptations being made to the approach for each project (Gratton & Beddows, 2018). While involving community researchers in the process was both time- and resource-intensive, Get Talking’s “responsive, purpose-driven, challenge-led, and team-based approach” to research, although clearly different from traditional forms of academic research, played an important part in the knowledge economy (Brink, 2018, pp. 2018).

As Get Talking became established in CCU, the approach was used for multiple projects, bringing closer alignment to teaching, research, and consultancy. The programme became increasingly driven by communities’ needs to take action in their geographic area or community of interest, ensuring the impact of the Get Talking approach is maximised. As the potential for the Get Talking approach to have research impact has been realised, the approach has become instrumental in both the development and implementation of the Connected Communities Framework.

## **The Limitations of the CCU Approach**

Insecurities resulting from the financial instability caused by the banking crisis of 2008 had a significant impact on the CCU. In 2015, CCU moved to a short course model in response to the impact of austerity measures in the UK on local authority and voluntary sector training budgets, on which CCU students typically relied. While on the surface, the move should have been a positive way of engaging more non-traditional university learners, in order to make the courses viable, large cohorts were required and therefore the short courses were only possible when commissioned by an organisation. Equally, the reduction in postgraduate programmes resulted in an increased need to secure additional funding through consultancy. These financial pressures had two effects on the practice of CCU that impacted on staffs’ ability to work within the defined principles. Firstly, the need to cover the costs of staff time and resources for projects excluded a range of community members, groups, and organsations which had previously worked with Staffordshire University on the grounds of mutual benefit through civic engagement. As a result, some long-established relationships with communities were affected, in particular with those groups less likely to engage with higher education.

The second effect was on the mission of the CCU as a unit. Given the diverse expertise of the team, combined by pressure felt by them to secure income for the sustainability of the unit, practice became driven by projects through which funding could be sourced, not by a clear strategy for community or civic engagement. As a result, the activity of the various team members became fractured and although they were complimentary on some level, did not work towards a collective vision for the unit. Groark & McCall (2018) discuss the need for balanced leadership in higher education engagement units, who understand the needs of communities, the unit, and the organisation. Although the team were experienced pracademics (Posner, 2008), there was little coordinated leadership support to embed the engagement activity of the unit at a faculty or university strategy level.

Taken in the current higher education context, much of CCU driven change as described above would be recognised as impact. However, during the lifespan of CCU, before the impact in research agenda grew in strength in the UK there was less external pressure to evidence impact. While evaluations and reports were produced as outputs on a project basis, no wider evaluation of CCU’s impact was made, making it difficult to articulate the difference the work had made and how it contributed to the overall civic and social impact of the university. Therefore, while there was ample activity taking place, there was little strategic coordination, with no measurement of the impact it had on those involved, the city or on Staffordshire University. A lack of strategy for community engagement and limited understanding of the impact of community engagement activity therefore became increasingly problematic, both within the team and for the wider university. As stated in the Truly Civic report, there is a difference between being civically engaged as a university and being a civic university,

Our view is that a university can only be regarded as a *civic university* if purpose – and strategy to support that purpose – includes making a positive civic impact. Universities which do not do this, but which do undertake valuable civic activity, can only be regarded as a *civically engaged university*….Being a civic university involves a level of effort and direction that has profound implications for how an institution operates. (UPP Foundation, 2019a p. 34)

The next section explores how these limitations were addressed to embed a vision for a civic university at a strategic level at Staffordshire University and the enabling factors that contributed to this development.

## **Towards a Civic University**

While the foundations of civic engagement had been built over several years, it took three parallel developments to embed this engagement at a strategic level. The first emerged from increased financial pressures on CCU which significantly reduced the size of the team. While on the surface this brought capacity issues, it also provided an opportunity to reframe the work carried out by existing team members. Remaining team members were able to develop a more specific focus for their work, draw on the civic expertise of others in the university and ensure greater alignment and connectivity between their work.

Around the same time, a newly appointed executive team embedded ‘connections’ at the heart of the new university strategy, asserting Staffordshire University as the Connected University and entrusting a senior executive with the task of implementing a Connected Communities strategy across the institution. The remaining CCU team members were supported to develop a model for this engagement activity that could be rolled out across the university: The Connected Communities Framework. Involving CCU staff in the development of the framework created a strong connection between the overall vision of the university and existing community engagement activities, and provided the CCU with an understanding of the breadth and depth of community activity across the institution. Crucially, it also provided an opportunity to build on the fundamental principles and activities of the CCU for the benefit of the whole institution, its staff and its wider communities.

Two national conversations and policy shifts enabled the civic engagement work of the CCU to be positioned within a more strategic framework. As the REF formalised the pathways to impact for research in a higher education context (REF 2021, 2019), the potential to maximise impact from civic engagement became apparent. As such, CCU staff were encouraged to reposition their research to fit within the impact agenda. Equally the UPP Foundation published the Truly Civic report, setting a challenge to the higher education sector and the UK government to better fulfil the civic roles and responsibilities of universities, to produce civic agreements with key partners in localities, and have clear strategies rooted in analysis of local need (UPP Foundation, 2019a). Consultation and engagement on the Connected Communities Framework had started prior to the launch of the Truly Civic report, providing a strong foundation for the longer-term development of Staffordshire University’s Civic Agreement.

## **The Connected Communities Framework**

Staffordshire University’s Connected Communities Framework is depicted as a series of concentric circles to indicate stakeholders, activities, reflection and feedback, monitoring and evaluation, and reward and recognition. Although designed to inform civic engagement at an institutional level, the CCU principles of participation, inclusion and action driven practice are clearly visible in both the framework and its development.

Insert Figure 1 ABOUT here: The Connected Communities Framework

The Connected Communities Framework encourages connections between six sets of stakeholders: students, staff, community members, community organisations, alumni, and civic partners. It also outlines six broad areas of activity through which improved relationships with local communities could be established for mutual benefit, including research, teaching and learning, volunteering, knowledge exchange, events, and access to spaces and places. The outer circles of the framework focus on monitoring and evaluation, with further emphasis on recognition and celebration of civic engagement, set within the core values of the institution.

The CCU principles informed both the design and implementation of the Connected Communities Framework. Students, staff, and members of the public were consulted in the design of the framework, using creative engagement techniques, such as board games, to gather feedback. However, the use of participatory practices in the governance and implementation of the framework are significantly different to previous grassroots practices of the CCU. Firstly, responsibility for implementation of the framework is overseen by a steering group, chaired by a past member of the CCU. Although a previous informal network for sharing practice existed, the Connected Communities Framework steering group is more structured, with membership comprising of students, staff, community organisation representatives and members of the public. The group contributes to action planning, implementation and evaluation. This collective approach to governance improves ownership of the Connected Communities Framework across the institution, ensures consistency and allows previous learning to be utilised at a strategic level.

Get Talking continues to support the Connected Communities Framework by contributing to research activity. However, whereas Get Talking has previously been used to work on small scale projects with little connection to university operations, through the framework the network of community researchers developed by the CCU are also able to inform the ongoing community engagement activity of the university. Monitoring and evaluation of the framework, and the development of Staffordshire University’s Civic Agreement, will include Get Talking consultations, involving local people as community researchers. Crucially, the Connected Communities Framework allows for closer alignment between Get Talking and the university’s research and knowledge exchange frameworks, highlighting the benefits of community based research approaches for academics, communities and students alike.

Recognition and celebration of civic engagement is prominent in the framework. While recognition of staff and student community engagement are achieved through course feedback, appraisals, and staff and student annual award ceremonies, no such opportunities existed to recognise the contributions of community members to the university. Drawing on the CCU principle of building strong relationships with communities and the principle emphasising respect for partners outlined in the Kellogg Commission (McDowell, 2003; UUP Foundation, 2019), being unable to formally recognise the value of community contribution to the Connected Communities Framework was a considerable gap. Therefore, an honorary title of civic fellow was introduced for community members who make a significant contribution to the university. The voluntary title, which mirrors the status of research and visiting fellows, provides an opportunity for people with limited or no academic experience to engage with the university in a formal capacity. Civic fellowship activities can include curriculum development, research, volunteering or enhancing community university partnerships, with the aim of providing mutual benefit for the fellows, the university and communities alike.

## **Enabling Factors for Civic Universities**

Chang & Moore (2017) identify a series of enablers for effective public engagement in higher education. They outline how effective public engagement requires coordination and strategic support, flexibility for definitions, diversity of opportunities, and a clear framework for monitoring and evaluation. This case study outlines how the journey towards a civic university relied on these factors, and alignment of other enablers, including celebration of community contributions and building strategies from principled foundation.

Coordination and support at an institutional level have been most influential in embedding civic engagement in the strategic vision of Staffordshire University. Commitment at the executive and governor levels, grown out of national conversations about the civic responsibilities of higher education and research impact, resulted in the Connected Communities Framework becoming aligned with other university policies, offering a refreshed vision for how Staffordshire University can deliver its civic responsibilities.

Flexibility was a central principle for CCU and remains such for the Connected Communities Framework. A challenge for the implementation of the Connected Communities Framework is to ensure the whole university, regardless of subject area, can engage with the framework. Flexibility of definitions are therefore vital to ensure civic engagement is as relevant to mathematicians as sociologists, requiring coordinators of the framework to collaborate closely with faculty staff to support the dispersed implementation of the strategy across the university (Groark & McCall, 2018). Support sessions provide staff with opportunities to discuss the Connected Communities Framework within the context of their subject or work area, maximising the reach of the framework within the university and the impact this has within a wide range of communities.

Similarly, diversity of opportunity is a further enabling factor for effective public engagement (Chang & Moore, 2017). The Connected Communities Framework offers a broad range of opportunities through a loose structure for civic engagement activities, but is not prescriptive in how these activities should be delivered. The focus is instead on the potential social impact of the work. The need to expand the delivery of opportunities from a small focused team to the whole university requires the activities highlighted within the framework to be diverse enough for all stakeholders to identify suitable methods of engagement. This diversity of opportunities, alongside the flexibility of definitions makes the Connected Communities Framework inclusive to a wider audience than the CCU was able to reach.

Chang & Moore make the case for evaluation as a means of “fostering discourse across potential divides” (2017, p. 26). Monitoring and impact evaluation are vital features of the framework providing Staffordshire University with an understanding of how their civic engagement impacts on their civic area. However, the framework goes further than Chang & Moore suggest, including reward and recognition as part of the same cycle as monitoring and evaluation. A potential criticism of coproduced knowledge and university-community collaborations is of the expectations placed on the time and resource commitments of community partners, particularly voluntary or charity sector organisations or community members who are not paid for their interactions with universities (Cohen et al., 2017). There was also a lack of acknowledgement of the impact community members, who are not engaged as students, can make to the university. This lack of acknowledgement was addressed in part by the introduction of the civic fellowship role, through which the university makes a clear statement about the value of community partnerships to the institution and the Connected Communities Framework.

University-community partnerships and engagement needs to be sustained beyond the life of short-term projects (Chang & Moore, 2017). Participatory approaches, such as the use of Get Talking, develop skills for sustainability in communities and within universities. However, understanding the impact of the Connected Communities Framework is essential to secure the long-term investment required to embed civic engagement into core activity of all universities (Groark & McCall, 2018) and therefore a clear and consistent means of evaluating civic engagement activity is necessary for sustained engagement. Equally, understanding the collective impact of civic activity is one of the defining features of a civic university (UPP Foundation, 2019a). While the CCU were able to understand the individual impact of projects, their understanding of the collective impact of the university’s civic engagement was limited. The Connected Communities Framework has embedded a consistent system for monitoring and evaluation for all activity, utilizing existing measures where possible, and underpinned, in part, by participatory principles.

Chang and Moore’s (2017) enabling factors for public engagement reflect factors that supported Staffordshire University’s journey towards a civic university. However, the case study presents a further enabling factor to those already identified. The development of a robust strategic approach to civic engagement in higher education was strengthened by building on a solid set of principles from community-based practice. Participation, inclusion and action driven practice remain important features of the framework, ensuring people are valued as equal partners in its delivery, long term relationships are prioritised over short term projects and universities can realise their potential as agents of change by working collectively with communities and civic partners.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the journey of one institution from a civically engaged university to a civic university,by building a university-wide strategy based on tried and tested principles and practices of a well-established unit with its foundations in community development work. The result is a strategy that will have significant implications for how Staffordshire University operates and understands the difference it makes to its place, a vital defining characteristic of a civic university (UPP Foundation, 2019a). The national debate reiterating the value of civic universities makes a strong case for universities to strengthen their strategic commitment to civic engagement. However, the transformation within this case study relied on the alignment of additional enabling factors including executive commitment to maximising the social value of the University and well established, participatory grass roots activity and relationships established through the CCU.

Although participatory engagement with communities is considered a means of addressing power imbalances between universities and communities (Cohen et al, 2017), the benefit of the interaction often falls largely with the higher education institution itself. Universities therefore must consider, not only the contribution community engagement can make to the institution, but equally their own role as civic partners. This case study illustrates how, with strategic institutional support, community development principles can inform a strategy which takes a university from an institution delivering localised community engagement projects towards its vision of being an impactful and locally relevant civic university that contributes to real change with the communities it serves.

**References**

Ally, S, & Smith, M. (2004). Timeline: Tuition Fees. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2004/jan/27/tuitionfees.students>

Arnstein, S. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *AIP Journal, 35,* 216-224.

Batsleer, J., & Davies, B. (2010). *What is youth work?* Exeter: Learning Matters.

Brackmann, S. M. (2015). Community Engagement in a neoliberal paradigm. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 19*(4) 115-146.

Brennan, J., Cochrane, A., Lebeau, Y. and Williams, R. (2018). *The University in its Place: Social and Cultural Perspectives on the Regional Role of Universities.* Dortrecht. Springer.

Brink, C. (2018). *The soul of a university*. Bristol: Bristol University.

CHAD (2019). Welcome to CHAD. Retrieved from: <https://www.chadresearch.co.uk/>

Chang, M., & Moore, G. (2017). Enabling conditions for communities and universities to work together: a journey of university public engagement. In A. Ersoy (Ed.) *The impact of coproduction: From community engagement to social justice*. 9-29. Bristol: Policy Press.

Cohen, S., Herbert, A., Evans, N., & Samzelius, T. (2017). From poverty to life chances: Framing co-produced research in the productive margins programme. In A. Ersoy (ed.) *The impact of coproduction: From community engagement to social justice.* 61-84. Bristol: Policy Press.

Cornwall, A., & Jewkes, R. (1995). What is participatory research? *Social Science and Medicine.* *41*(12) 1667-1676.

Clarke, A. (2011) A Guide to using the Community Development National Occupational Standards. Retrieved from: [www.cdnl.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/CDNOS-Guide1.pdf](http://www.cdnl.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/CDNOS-Guide1.pdf)

Department for Education (2016). Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Area Review: Final Report. Retrieved from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/585767/Stoke_and_Staffs_15_November_2016_FINAL.pdf>

Department for Education (2019a) Graduate outcomes (LEO): Employment and earnings outcomes of Higher Education graduates by subject studied and graduate characteristics in 2016/17. Retrieved from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/790223/Main_text.pdf>

Department for Education (2019b) Participation rates in Higher Education. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-rates-in-higher-education-2006-to-2017>

Elliott, M., & Wall, N. (2008). Should nurse academics engage in clinical practice? *Nurse Education Today*, *28*, 558-587.

Emadi-Coffin, B. (2008). Get Talking: Community participation and neighbourhood learning. *Widening participation and Lifelong Learning, 10*(3), 30 – 34.

Gratton, N. (2014). Get Talking with Appetite: An evaluation of year one. Retrieved from: blogs.staffs.ac.uk/ccu/current-research-and-projects/creative-and-participatory-evaluation/appetite/appetiteevaluationyr1/

Gratton, N. & Beddows, R. (2018). Get Talking: Managing to Achieve More through Creative Consultation. In M. Stout (Ed) *From Austerity to Abundance? (Critical Perspectives on International Public Sector Management, Volume 6),* 141 – 160. Bingley.Emerald Publishing*.*

Gratton, N. & Corcoran, P. (2018). People with learning disabilities and their access to mainstream cultural activity. Retrieved from: <https://reachasist.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/people-with-learning-disabilities-and-their-access-to-mainstream-cultural-activity.pdf>

Gratton, N., & Jones, I. (2016). Social value forecast of Stoke-on-Trent winning its bid to be UK City of Culture 2021. Retrieved from: <https://blogs.staffs.ac.uk/connections/files/2019/06/City-of-culture-forecast-report-final-NF.pdf>

Groark, C. J. & McCall, R. J. (2018). Lessons learned from 30 years of a University-Community Engagement Center. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and* Engagement. 22(2), 7 – 29.

Hetherington, J. (2015). Content Guidance Communication for Family Arts Events. Available from: [www.familyarts.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Content-Guidance.pdf](http://www.familyarts.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Content-Guidance.pdf)

Jeffs, T. & Smith, M.K. (2010) Introducing Youth Work. In Jeffs, T. & Smith, M. K. *Youth Work Practice*. 1-14. Hampshire. Palgrave Macmillan.

Jorge M. L., & Peña F.J.A. (2017). Analysing the literature on university social responsibility: A review of selected higher education journals. *Higher Education Quarterly, 71,* 302–319.

Ledwith, M. and Springett, J. (2010). *Participatory practice: Community-based action for transformative change.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Kara, H. (2015). *Creative research methods in the social sciences: A practical guide*. Bristol. Policy Press.

Mathie, A. & Cunningham, G. (2003). From Clients to Citizens: Asset-Based Community Development as a Strategy for Community-Driven Development*. Development in Practice*, *13*(5) 474-486.

McDowell, G. R. (2003). Engaged Universities: Lessons from the Land-Grant Universities and Extension. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 585,* 31-50.

McIntyre, A. (2008). *Participatory Action Research*. London: Sage.

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2019). The English Indices of Deprivation 2019. Statistical Release. Retrieved from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835115/IoD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf>

NCCPE (2018a). The Current Policy Landscape. Retrieved from: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/current-policy-landscape>

NCCPE (2018b). What is public engagement? Retrieved from: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/what-public-engagement>

Petty, G. (2004). *Teaching Today: A Practical Guide.* Cheltenham. Nelson Thornes.

Posner, P. (2009). The pracademic: An agenda for Re-Engaging Practitioners and Academics. *Public Budgeting & Finance, 29*(1), 12-26.

REF 2021 (2019). Guidance on submissions. Retrieved from: <https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1092/ref-2019_01-guidance-on-submissions.pdf>

Research England (2019). Knowledge Exchange Framework Consultation. Retrieved from: <https://re.ukri.org/documents/2019/kef-consultation/>

UPP Foundation (2019a). Truly Civic: Strengthening the connection between universities and their place. Retrieved from: [https://upp-foundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Civic-University-Commission-Final-Report.pdf Accessed on 25.4.19](https://upp-foundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Civic-University-Commission-Final-Report.pdf%20Accessed%20on%2025.4.19)

UPP Foundation (2019b). Civic University Agreements: List of Signatories. Retrieved from: <https://upp-foundation.org/civic-university-agreements-list-of-signatories/>

Walter, M. (2008). *Participatory Action Research*. [Online] Retrieved from: <https://www.academia.edu/3563840/Participatory_Action_Research>

Vincent, P. (2010). Quality Streets Feedback. Retrieved from: <http://blogs.staffs.ac.uk/ccu/files/2014/01/Quality-Streets-Short-Report.pdf>