

## Strategic Engagement with Business and the Community

Briefing paper

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### What is business and community engagement?

Business and community engagement is the strategic management of partnerships with the wider community to share knowledge and expertise for mutual benefit. It encompasses a range of activities from consultancy and continuing professional development services, to the commercial application of research, to public events and festivals.

### Why do institutions need to fully commit to business and community engagement now?

Collaboration with external organisations is not a new concept for research and teaching in UK higher and further education institutions, however there is increasing pressure on institutions to develop an integrated business and community engagement strategy from both the institutional and external perspectives. Political developments include the charities commissioners' pressure on institutions to fulfil their role in delivering public benefit and the Sainsbury, Leitch and Foster reports urging institutions to fill innovation and skills gaps. Other pressures on institutions include: business sustainability, creating new income streams, professionalising their services and coping with changing student demands and profiles and transitioning from legacy to new technologies and processes.

### What are the institutional benefits of developing a strategy?

There are many benefits to be gained by developing a business and community engagement strategy including, strategic advantage, greater efficiency and effectiveness, knowledge, skills and career development, creating value from relationships and business opportunities.

### Exploiting technology effectively

Online networking provides new opportunities and new dynamics for collaborative partnerships and interactions, which institutions are well-placed to harness, to enrich learning, teaching and research.

*The internet and related ICTs are arguably the most important platform for innovation today, enabling flows of knowledge and linking innovators around the world.*

**The 2009 Interim Report on the OECD Innovation Strategy**

### Strategic advantage

A well-designed business and community engagement programme can give institutions a strong competitive edge. By becoming more agile and responsive to customer needs, institutions can carve out an enhanced presence in the marketplace. The wealth of expertise that exists in universities and colleges remains untapped in many cases – but exploiting that expertise can transform the landscape of innovation in the UK. To be successful, institutions need to differentiate themselves and play to their strengths. This may mean choosing carefully which partner organisations they want to work with, and referring customers to different institutions if they can't provide exactly what the customer needs. Collaboration with other institutions will almost certainly be essential to the success of an external engagement programme.

### Greater efficiency and effectiveness

A sustainable business and community engagement strategy will entail integrating the approaches employed by different departments, and introducing staff training and continued professional development. Before developing a business and community engagement strategy, institutions will need to have a detailed knowledge of their own internal operations, culture, processes and resources if they want to be able to respond more quickly to external demands. They will have to improve their operational efficiency to coordinate and centralise information that may be held in different parts of the institution.

### Maintaining the advantage: knowledge, skills and career development

Collaboration with business and community partners can provide a career boost for staff, as well as enrich their research and teaching. Working across boundaries is demanding, requiring a distinct skill-set, including negotiation, brokering and high-level communications skills as well as broad experience, but it is also highly rewarding.

## Why JISC supports business and community engagement

We believe that by managing information across external engagement activities and by exploiting online technologies, institutions can derive strategic advantage and new opportunities, both for themselves and for their partners. Further, this will enhance their efficiency, effectiveness and improve access to institutions' knowledge and expertise for business and community organisations. Working with our partners, we provide good practice, advice and guidance services in an ongoing programme of work.

## Creating value from relationship management

Institutions can gain greater return on their investment in resources and services, and the public investment in them, by extending access to business and community organisations. Strategic use of relationship management processes and software enables institutions to manage their relationships with business and community partners, students and alumni more effectively. By recording and reviewing their interactions with partners in a coherent way, institutions can ensure that these relationships are delivering value rather than acting as a drain on the institution's resources.

## Business opportunities

Business and community engagement offers a way ahead for institutions of higher education facing numerous external pressures, whether economic or social. There are significant opportunities for institutions to generate benefits by offering services to external organisations, to co-develop good ideas into

attractive prospects, whether of social or economic value, or both, and to contribute to the country's social cohesion and economic sustainability. JISC can help institutions rise to the challenge.

## What does a successful business and community engagement strategy look like?

A successful strategy requires an institution-wide approach to relationship management with customers and partners, cross-departmental management of external interactions and data sharing, a clear understanding of target markets and a focus on strengths.

A successful engagement strategy can solve problems, provide solutions and present opportunities as the following examples illustrate:

- The university's different departments may be duplicating each other's efforts, or making relationships with clients that could be of benefit to other parts of the institution
- A local business may need a solution that could be uniquely provided by the joint efforts of two different research departments
- A department may know of a charity with professional development needs for its staff that could be met by a different part of the institution

This briefing paper was written by Kim Thomas, on behalf of JISC, and edited by Dicky Maidment-Otlet.

Alternative formats of this briefing paper can be found at: [www.jisc.ac.uk/publications](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications)

## Further Information and Resources

JISC's Business and Community Engagement programme  
[www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/bce](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/bce)

BCE Consultation Workshop report  
[www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/bce/bceconsultationworkshops\\_apr09.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/bce/bceconsultationworkshops_apr09.pdf)

JISC Advance  
[www.jiscadvance.ac.uk/bce](http://www.jiscadvance.ac.uk/bce)

Innovation Support Centres  
<http://jisc.cetis.ac.uk>

JISC InfoNet: Embedding business and community engagement  
[www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/bce/embedding-bce](http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/bce/embedding-bce)

Do institutions need customers? [Abstract and audio file]  
[www.jisc.ac.uk/events/2009/03/jiscconference09/programme/bce](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/events/2009/03/jiscconference09/programme/bce)

Who are our customers? Where are our learners? blog post  
<http://erevolution.jiscinvolve.org/2009/08/18/who-are-our-customers-where-are-our-learners>

Know your processes, know your markets: How to avoid building bridges on quicksand blog post  
[http://erevolution.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/08/jisc\\_bce\\_introwhittemoredoc.doc](http://erevolution.jiscinvolve.org/files/2009/08/jisc_bce_introwhittemoredoc.doc)

JISC infoNet Strategy infoKit  
[www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/strategy](http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/strategy)

JISC infoNet Change Management infoKit  
[www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/change-management](http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/change-management)

JISC Advance BCE projects  
[www.jiscadvance.ac.uk/bce/bce-projects](http://www.jiscadvance.ac.uk/bce/bce-projects)

Collaborative Tools 4 BCE blog  
<http://collaborativetools4bce.jiscinvolve.org/about>

Business Information Resources  
[www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/bce/stream4resfinalreport.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/bce/stream4resfinalreport.pdf)

Extending Access Management to BCE  
[www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/bce/extendingaccessmanagementreport.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/bce/extendingaccessmanagementreport.pdf)

Enterprise-wide relationship management  
[www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/bce/relationshipmanagement](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/bce/relationshipmanagement)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Self-analysis Framework  
<http://jisc.cetis.ac.uk/crm-tools>

CRM analytics tool  
[www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/bce/crm4uni](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/bce/crm4uni)