

Higher Education Community Engagement Model User Guide

Introduction to the model

Background

The Higher Education Community Engagement Model (HECEM) was created in 2003 by several Russell Group universities in collaboration with the Corporate Citizenship Company (see page 7). It is based on the London Benchmarking Model which is used by many large companies to measure their contributions to the community and has been adapted for use by any higher education institution (HEI). The model was piloted in 2003, underwent a large scale evaluation and was opened up for use by any HEI in 2006.

Scope and aim

The model aims to capture community activities which are conducted over and above the University's core purposes of teaching and research. 'Community' is defined here in its broadest sense – i.e. any contribution which would be broadly accepted by society as charitable. The HECE Model has shown itself to have a number of applications, including:

- As a tool for systematic monitoring, this in turn can be used to inform strategic decisions.
- Hard evidence for senior managers to demonstrate the value of community activities.
- For public relations and marketing purposes.

This User Guide

This guide is primarily designed for those who have not implemented the HECE Model before and it also serves as an aide memoir for those re-running it. The observations it contains build on key lessons learned through a reflection exercise conducted by Sam Burke in 2006 (see page 7).

The model explanation comprises:

- This *User Guide*, which is designed to be read in conjunction with the book "*Companies in communities: valuing the contribution*" (David Logan and Michael Tuffrey, 1999).
- The *survey and return pack*, which provides copies of spreadsheets used to collate and analyse the data collected (known as *the survey* and *the return*). It also gives more detail about specific questions asked in the survey and the process used for analysing the data.

The implementation of the HECE Model is generally co-ordinated by an individual or a small team who facilitate the three key stages of the process. This Guide offers them a basic step by step explanation to these stages and the steps they involve, as outlined below:

Stage I: Scoping what will be surveyed and conducting the survey

1. Identify what will be surveyed using the model guidelines.
2. Identify how the survey will be conducted.
3. Conduct **the survey**.

Stage II: Analysis of the Survey

1. Collating the survey data received from the units within the institution using the '**return document**' (Appendix 2).
2. Using the return to give a summary of all of their Higher Education Institution's (HEI) activity surveyed.

Stage III: Dissemination of the findings

1. Developing a communication plan to share the data gathered internally and externally.
2. Sharing data through benchmarking.

Stage I: Scoping what will be surveyed and conducting the survey

Aim of Stage I and main steps

This first stage establishes the scope of the HECEM implementation and the survey to be conducted.

Steps

1. Identify what will be surveyed using the model guidelines.
2. Identify how the survey will be conducted and agree the process internally.
3. Conduct **the survey**.

Tips for each step

1. Identify what will be surveyed using the model guidelines

As with other management exercises users have a choice about the scope of their survey; do they capture data from all community activities conducted over and above the Institution's core purposes of teaching and research, or from specific units?

For example, many participants of the pilot received funding from the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) through the Active Community Fund (HEACF). They **constrained** their survey to only include community activities receiving funding from this source, while others widened the scope to include activities outside of the HEACF. Limiting the scope of the survey has a number of benefits:

- It ensures that the survey can be piloted so that lessons can be identified if the scope is broadened – particularly if you are looking for senior level support to run a wider survey in the future.
- The survey is realistic, in terms of what can be achieved with the resources available.
- It is often easier to gather meaningful data from units where there are already established links/relationships.

If you are considering completing the survey with all units known to be running community engagement activities, for example including departments, colleges, student societies and museums, you may wish to consider:

- Enlisting senior level support, perhaps circulating a letter from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor or the University's committee responsible for community activities.
- Showing those who take part how the data collection process meets University/Divisional aims and objectives.

Advantages to running an institution wide survey include:

- Identifying projects and activities which were not known previously.
- Raising the profile of community engagement activities internally.
- Having a wider sample, making data more robust.

When scoping the survey, in true project management style, it is useful to think about *what*, *when* and *where* information will be disseminated. Questions about who the information is for and how the information will be utilised (e.g. for performance or strategic management, promotion, raising awareness) will be key in fine tuning the scope of a HECE Model survey. As a starting point, if piloting the model, you may find it easiest to pick the units to survey which you know are most active in community investment.

2. Identify how the survey will be conducted

The spreadsheet used to collate data gathered has 25 data questions applied to each activity surveyed. A step by step guide to each question is outlined in more detail within the *Higher Education Community Engagement Survey and Return pack*. Typically, a questionnaire or interview sheet is devised which enables the data to be elucidated either face to face or

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remotely. This is then entered into the spreadsheet, either by an interviewer or a colleague with data entry skills. Approaches to consider for data gathering can range from:

- Structured or semi-structured face-to-face interviews with staff members from relevant schools/teams/service units.
- Hard copy or on-line questionnaires completed by participants without any face-to-face contact.

Conducting face-to-face interviews to gather data has several advantages, including:

- Yielding more reliable and accurate data, as there is an opportunity to clarify information supplied.
- Encouraging colleagues to get engaged, perhaps reducing the data collection time, and enabling them to find out more about the survey, and its aims.
- Interview questions can be sent out before the interview to help interviewees prepare/collate relevant data in advance.
- If time/scope of the survey allows using the same interviewer helps with consistency - where one interviewer is impractical it is helpful to offer a briefing for all interviewers to encourage a standardised approach.
- You may find it helpful ask colleagues to help you undertake the interviews, running a training session for them to ensure consistency.

The notable disadvantage of conducting face-to-face interviews is that it can be expensive in terms of staff time.

Whatever approach is adopted it is helpful to provide some form of additional briefing information to participants, designed to help them understand the purpose of the survey and the type of data collected. Other ideas include:

- Having a designated telephone 'hotline' number to answer questions as they arise, (where the survey is not conducted face-to-face).
- Offering a prize draw of £50 to student societies who take part to increase the response rate.

3. Conduct the survey

Another important question to consider is *when* should the survey be conducted? The timescale of data collection is an important factor affecting its accuracy, particularly with the diverse nature of the management of information systems often used by units within the institution; it is useful to consider how you will handle:

- Information not previously collected but required for the survey. Do you for example ask colleagues to reflect back to provide estimates/best guesses?
- Conversely, in instances where activities have not yet been completed do you ask colleagues to provide projections and estimates? This again introduces the potential for inaccuracies.

Other suggestions to assist the data collection process include:

- Providing units taking part with the survey template at the outset of a project, so they are aware of the data they should aim to collect (a sample is given in the *Higher Education Community Engagement Survey and Return pack*).
- Briefing staff about the survey at the start of the academic year so that they can start to collect timely data and encourage project teams/units to collect data throughout the year, then conducting an interview at the end of the year to iron out any inconsistencies.
- Make the survey questionnaires available on-line for project teams to enter their data themselves and to enable the data to be collated electronically.

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- Make sure a realistic assessment is made about the time/resources involved in conducting the survey, analysis and dissemination phases and adjust the scope accordingly.

Stage II: Analysis of the Survey

Aim of Stage II and main steps

To record data, add it to the survey spreadsheet and then use the return survey to collate data to an institution wide level (within the scope of the survey).

Steps:

1. Collating the survey data received from the units within the institution using the 'return document' (Annex B).
2. Using the return to give a summary of all of their Higher Education Institution's (HCI) activity surveyed.

Tips for each step

1. Collating the survey data

Once information is collected issues may arise about the **accuracy of the data**. You may want to build in measures to avoid/limit these, including:

- Overcoming other units' reluctance to provide financial information related to the cost of projects, identifying and addressing these objections ahead of data collection.
- Building in approaches to deal with the variety of measuring and target systems used by units, making comparison difficult.
- Considering how to deal with *paid staff time*: if this is averaged out across a number of projects data relating to paid staff may not be accurate at an individual project level.
- If *management costs* are mainly based on guesses and estimates, you may wish to leave it out as a measure.

2. Using the return to give a summary

The key figures generated by the summary that provide good headline figures, either for internal or external presentation are:

- The numbers of hours contributed.
- The subject focus of projects.
- In kind contributions.
- External funding.
- Beneficiary numbers.

It is also worth noting that the data is useful for community officers, for example to further target the specific support they give to community groups or to compare themselves with other projects.

Stage III: Dissemination of the findings

Aim of Stage III and main steps

This stage should be planned as part of the scoping of the HECE Model survey and identifies the audience (internal and external) and mechanisms (internal memos, press releases) for disseminating the data gathered through the survey process.

1. Developing a communication plan to share the data gathered internally and externally.
2. Sharing data through benchmarking.

1. Developing a communication plan to share data

Each institution will have its own template for producing a Communication plan, key features might include identifying:

- Relevant stakeholders (internal and external) and defining their communication needs.
- Different methods of communication and the timing of such activities (e.g. briefing events, a community engagement annual report).
- Methods to ensure feedback about the value/timeliness of communication activities.

Examples of dissemination activities undertaken by those who have used the HECE Model include:

- Issuing a full HECE Model report to senior managers, outlining all the data summarised through the return.
- Preparing material using the return data for specific staff members/units who had participated in the benchmarking survey. One institution developed this further by sub-dividing the data so that participants had feedback relating specifically to their own particular area.
- Using material to build a case (internally) for continued funding of community based activities.

2. Sharing data through benchmarking.

The model has been designed to offer a framework for institutions to compare their findings and thus use it as a benchmarking tool. The model has not been used in this way through its piloting, as the emphasis was on developing a model and sharing lessons learnt from its implementation. It is worth noting that although the Model offers a framework for sharing data, it is also a flexible tool reliant upon being tailored to local application. Any benchmarking project would require extra scoping work to ensure that comparisons are made 'like for like' across those institutions taking part. This will ensure that the benchmarking compares as far as possible 'apples with apples, not apples with pears'. Alternatively institutions could agree to share key headline findings and models of good practice identified through the survey.

Acknowledgements

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University of Warwick

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Report on the Experience of Institutions Participating in the 2003-4 Pilot Benchmarking Survey,

Samantha Burke, January 2006.

The Corporate Citizenship Company,

<http://www.corporate-citizenship.co.uk/>

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For further reference you may want to refer to:

Companies in communities: valuing the contribution, David Logan and Michael Tuffrey, 1999.

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