

# ENGAGE WATERMARK

Action Plan 2023 - 2026

Wellcome Centre for Integrative Neuroimaging (WIN)

(University of Oxford)



## INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

At the Wellcome Centre for Integrative Neuroimaging (WIN) and its pre-WIN iterations, engagement has always played a primary role, and researchers and staff of all levels of seniority are involved in the delivery of our varied engagement programme. Indeed, WIN was set up in 2017 with engagement at its core. Through ringfenced funding from Wellcome, we have been able to offer a wide variety of training and support for engagement, as well as ample opportunity to put that training into practice with a wide variety of audiences and engagement types. As a result, engagement at the Centre is flourishing and we have an ever-growing team of skilled engaged researchers and staff.

Our reasons for applying for a Watermark Award, which we started late in 2021, are three-fold.

1. The process would provide us with an opportunity to take stock of our practice and reflect on how we have performed against the strategic aims we set out in our 5-year strategy for public engagement in 2018.
2. The process would provide us with an opportunity to benchmark WIN's engagement practices against national standards.
3. As we are coming up to the end of our Wellcome funding, the award would also provide us with documentation certifying our public engagement practice, to use in support of future funding applications for our Centre.

Going through the Watermark process has been instructive. It has allowed us to take stock separately from our existing extensive evaluation processes (evaluation of individual events, evaluation of support structures, and evaluation of progress against our strategic aims) and has resulted in improvements in the signposting and support systems we have in place for our researchers. We have extensively discussed the results of the Watermark report with our PE steering committee and have decided to focus our attention on five key areas. These key areas align closely with those highlighted by our evaluation consultant (Dr Clodagh Miskelley) and our External Advisory Board (July 2022). Activities in the highlighted key areas will also address comments and triggers to action we do not specifically highlight as a key focus, because they will be woven throughout the actions (e.g., more training for researchers, mentoring and peer-to-peer learning, managing workload through consolidation and reinforcing multiple aims, and showcasing excellence).

In the following sections we will highlight the key actions and detail the rationale, activities, responsibilities and funding streams that will underpin these actions.

**KEY ACTION 1: WE ARE UPDATING OUR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY TO FOCUS ON “ENGAGEMENT” MORE BROADLY; TO ENCOMPASS PATIENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, POLICY, AND PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

*A key issue for WIN, highlighted in the Watermark ‘Discussion points and triggers for action’, is future sustainability of engagement.*

The Centre is coming to the end of its Wellcome funding and while other funding streams have already been obtained, funding will be tighter than it has been since the start of WIN in 2017. Over the lifespan of our Wellcome funding, our engagement strategy has been aligned with the requirements stipulated by the funding and has meant that PE at WIN was focused specifically on *public* engagement.

However, in recent years, engagement has become more focused on other forms of engagement, including patient and public involvement (PPI), policy engagement and community engagement, in order to maximise the impact research has on society. Funders also increasingly require research to have a larger impact on wider society, which is reflected also in the new strategic directions for engagement at the central level of Oxford University.

Against this backdrop, we are pivoting towards a more holistic approach to engagement. We will therefore update our current public engagement strategy to include patient and public involvement, policy engagement, and community engagement, as well as public engagement.

We expect that closer alignment with funder requirements will increase our ability to successfully apply for funding. In addition, this will broaden the reach our research will have on society by increasing the avenues for engagement and impact. This more integrated approach to engagement will provide a clear and straightforward pathway to impact for our researchers. In addition, the PE team will be better placed to identify pathways to impact for individual researchers and provide training and support for those who want to incorporate engagement more structurally into their research.

<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Funding</i>	<i>Activities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carinne and Heidi</li> <li>• WIN PE Steering Committee (Stuart, Holly, Sana, Saad, Ludo, Hanna)</li> <li>• WIN PPI, policy, and EDI staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current core funding (no real costs, just staff costs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy meetings scheduled for January and February (HJB, SC, HS &amp; CP)</li> <li>• Evaluation and strategy meeting CM, HS &amp; CP</li> <li>• Strategy meeting with PPI and Policy teams (Feb)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategy meeting with External evaluator Clodagh Miskelly</li><li>• Steering Committee (Feb)</li></ul>
--	--	--

## KEY ACTION 2: INCREASING THE NUMBER OF RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT CAN BE DESCRIBED AS "ENGAGED RESEARCH"

*A second key issue highlighted in the Watermark 'Discussion points and triggers for action' centres around the impact of our research on society. It calls for more 'impactful PE' to help forge stronger relationships between researchers and stakeholders and allow for a more socially informed research agenda.*

Our engagement programmes to date have focused in large part on informing and inspiring our audiences, as well as on improving communication and engagement skills of our researchers. A much smaller number of projects have focused on publics influencing our research and engagement. While we will continue to focus our attention on informing and inspiring our audiences (eg through school engagement and brain health roadshows), we recognise the need to involve publics more strongly in our research and have thought carefully, with input also from our External Advisory Board, how we might approach this key objective.

By widening the engagement agenda to include PPI, policy engagement, and community engagement, we will increase the capacity in the PE team to provide training in PPI and policy engagement, as well support researchers to create mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders. In addition, training will provide a better understanding for researchers of how PPI and policy engagement might improve the impact of their research.

Activities to help fulfil this key issue will focus on training our researchers. In addition, researchers will be asked to discuss their plans for engagement in mandatory project proposal meetings where engagement staff will be present to discuss the merits of the proposed engagement plans alongside the merit of the research plans. The PE team will then help the researcher to identify and work with key stakeholders.

We will also create a library of 'routes to engagement' to identify pathways to impact for key areas of WIN research, to help researchers identify areas of engagement suitable to their research.

Together, we hope these activities will lead to more researchers understanding the benefits of engaged research, leading to more WIN research with an engagement element. Ultimately, we would expect this to improve outcomes for our research and researchers, as well as for our stakeholders.

<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Funding</i>	<i>Activities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PE team (Carinne and Hanna)</li> <li>• Researchers</li> <li>• Senior leadership team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current core funding</li> <li>• BRC funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy engagement capacity building</li> <li>• Policy engagement training for PIs to help identify research projects early on</li> <li>• Project proposal slides to include plans for engagement</li> <li>• 'Routes to engagement' blueprints developed by PE staff and senior leadership</li> </ul>

### KEY ACTION 3: INCREASING DIVERSITY IN: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS, RESEARCH FOCUS, AND ENGAGEMENT

*A third key issue from the 'Discussion points and triggers for action' highlights the need to develop a more nuanced understanding of underserved audiences affected by WIN research and engagement.*

We are aware that our research is not currently equitable and only serves a portion of society. There is limited diversity among researchers at WIN and research topics are equally narrowly focused. In our engagement practice we strive to be inclusive and have focused major projects on reaching lower socioeconomic status areas (SES) and areas with lower science capital within Oxfordshire.

We will continue to provide science engagement opportunities in these areas, where we know from our evaluation processes that such activities provide much needed opportunities for students to learn about and see the scientific process in action and to help them understand that science as a career can be for everyone.

In addition, we want to focus on making our research more diverse and our research outcomes more universally applicable. To achieve sustainable diversity, we will focus first on making our research tools, practices and communications around these more inclusive. For instance, we need to ensure we have the appropriate equipment as well as knowledge of the needs of diverse participants in place before we can start recruiting diverse participants on a larger scale.

We have recently set up a working group to identify aspects of our research processes and materials that need to be more inclusive. This group will go through as many different types of our research as possible and identify where we need to make changes (e.g. communications, MR safe headscarves, different EEG set ups to deal with a variety of hair types, etc). The working group will collaborate with (paid) external representatives, as well as researchers who use different research techniques within WIN to deliver effective, sensitive, and sustainable changes. Furthermore, we aim to increase the impact of our research by understanding more fully how the diseases and topics we study affect people from different ethnicities differently and use this to inform new research questions. Finally, we aim to work with and build trusting relationships with community champions in those who have a stake in our research to help make the research more strongly aligned with the needs of those communities.

Together, we expect that more inclusive research practices, combined with better focused communications and relationship building, will lead to new, more diversely informed research

directions. This will allow more people to have a stake in our research and engagement with the research.

<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Funding</i>	<i>Activities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PE team</li> <li>• Researchers</li> <li>• Senior leadership team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current core funding</li> <li>• BRC funding</li> <li>• Small Inclusive Leadership grant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops with researchers and representatives to make research techniques and communications inclusive</li> <li>• Desk research to understand how the diseases we study affect people with different ethnicities differently to identify new key areas for research</li> <li>• Identifying key community champions to work with on engagement and research projects</li> <li>• New research questions to lead to more diversely focused research projects</li> </ul>

## KEY ACTION 4: IMPROVING REWARD AND RECOGNITION FOR ENGAGEMENT

*A fourth key issue from the ‘Discussion points and triggers for action’, the EDGE tool survey and our own surveys centres around reward and recognition for researchers taking part in engagement.*

Recognising involvement in engagement has always been complicated. Rewarding engagement might give researchers and staff the impression that it is an optional activity, as comments made in the EDGE tool survey suggest. Furthermore, if the goal is to make engagement an integral part of the research, should it be rewarded at all? On the other hand, it is important to recognise and reward involvement in engagement, especially until engagement becomes a widespread practice amongst researchers.

Doing engagement requires and builds a set of skills that are ultimately valuable to researchers in their careers. We will highlight the importance of these skills more effectively, for instance through case studies and examples on our website.

We are especially aware that early career researchers will be able to benefit from more formal recognition for their engagement practice. Our ambassador scheme provides a formal route for this type of recognition. In addition, questions around engagement are also part of personal development reviews and get formally discussed with line managers at least once a year.

In addition to these two aspects of reward and recognition, we will aim to provide more opportunities to showcase engagement practice through WIN’s communication systems, as well as seeking publicity more widely across the University and via social media. We will also consider a yearly award scheme for engagement, potentially to replace the current award for engagement that is part of WIN’s ‘Good Citizens Scheme’.

Improved reward and recognition will lead to researchers having a stronger understanding of why doing public engagement is important and realise the positive impact engagement skills can have on their scientific career.

<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Funding</i>	<i>Activities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PE team</li> <li>• Senior leadership team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current core funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition opportunities that are cost-free (except for staff time) will be prioritised, e.g. featuring researcher engagement success stories in WIN</li> </ul>

		<p>comms more regularly (newsletter, twitter)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highlight positive impact of engagement skills on research careers</li><li>• Consider a non-monetary nomination-based yearly award scheme for engagement</li></ul>
--	--	--

## KEY ACTION 5: WIDENING THE REACH OF OUR INITIATIVES

*A fifth key issue raised in the process is the relatively modest impact our engagement has regionally and nationally.*

When we created our public engagement strategy in 2018, we decided to focus our engagement activity reach locally to audiences in Oxford and the wider Oxfordshire county, specifically to focus on building long term relationships with our partners and audiences. In addition, we set out to share our engagement practice more widely through our capacity building programme. We have engaged with schools and communities across Oxfordshire (for instance in our Big Brain Roadshows, as well as our collaboration with the Banbury Museum and Gallery), and are currently running a programme of events alongside the touring Your Amazing Brain exhibition in Aylesbury with the Discover Bucks Museum. We aim to tour the exhibition further and we will continue to offer an engagement programme around the exhibition to engage with local (to the exhibition) audiences.

Given the generous amount of funding we receive from our Wellcome Centre grants, we also endeavour to share our engagement practice more widely so others can benefit from everything we have learned. As such, a number of us serve on committees, advisory boards, working groups and award/funding committees. We share our engagement locally (within the University), nationally, and internationally.

However, the Watermark results and subsequent discussion made us realise we might be able to share activities and practice more effectively while staying within the possibilities of our modest resources. We will connect with third parties to share materials and develop our policy engagement agenda to focus on gaining a wider reach and greater impact of our research.

We expect as a result of these efforts that our research and engagement practices will have a greater regional and national reach.

<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PE Team</li> <li>• WIN PE Steering Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current core funding</li> <li>• Policy Engagement funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue with plans to accredit and disseminate BReal materials nationally</li> <li>• Policy engagement training for PIs to help identify projects with potential for further reach</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work with Steering Committee to identify further opportunities</li></ul>
--	--	--