

UKTGA Abstract (November 2024)

Introduction:

A positive relationship between universities and their surrounding communities is vital for fostering mutual growth, understanding, and progress. Queen's Communities and Place (QCAP), launched in December 2021, is a research initiative that fosters equitable partnerships between communities, policymakers, and academics to address inequalities in areas of social, economic, and educational disadvantage. QCAP supports places and communities through engagement, research and impact. This session will illustrate the work of QCAP and the impact of effective community-academic partnership through enabling knowledge exchange, community empowerment, capacity building and sustained commitment to create positive, lasting change.

Operationalising effective practice: Introducing the QCAP model

Using a 'place-based' approach, QCAP co-creates solutions to tackle persistent challenges and strengthen engagement between Queen's University and its surrounding communities. QCAP has successfully engaged disadvantaged communities, using research and data to uncover issues, generate solutions, and translate findings into real change through targeted support and policy advocacy. The QCAP model provides a framework to successfully engage and connect with disadvantaged places and communities. The model sees the university engage with communities through community consultation, workshops, and action working groups; involving residents in co-design and implementation of programmes that respond to local challenges grouped around interconnected dimensions of place concerned with social issues, healthcare, and education.

Sharing knowledge of community-academic partnership: Showcasing success

Positive university-community partnerships provide benefits through enabling knowledge exchange, community empowerment, and driving local development. QCAP will share examples of demonstratable progress and success through community-academic engagement, including:

- University-level changes to create an enabling environment for sustained community-engaged research
- Commitment to equitable partnership e.g. co-designed Community Engagement Charter
- Democratising data to empower communities
- Development of OCN ICT Level 2 programme
- STEAM summer scheme "Tech Creators" inspiring local 8-12-year-olds
- Community Wellbeing Kitchen, a resident driven initiative responding to community challenges of physical and psychological health, and economic adversity
- Engaged research outputs, including academic articles, evaluation reports, policy papers, podcasts, community-based workshops
- Securing >£1 million in direct research funding, and >£11 million in indirect investment in local communities

Three case studies will showcase academic-community partnership in action:

1. Hosford community homes project – a transitional housing model;
2. Smart City-zens - an initiative to develop a model for inclusive innovation;
3. The 'Tackling substance use together' research programme

Identifying challenges in building and sustaining partnerships

Alongside positive aspects of community-academic partnership; difficulties exist. Learning around challenges such as: maintaining equitable partnerships, ensuring community voice is respected, sustaining engagement and keeping momentum and long-term commitment from stakeholders, will be reflected.

Conclusion: The session will highlight the work of QCAP, an initiative that exemplifies community-academic partnership. Through its place-based approach, securing of substantial research funding, indirect community investment, diverse engaged research outputs, and strategic partnerships, QCAP is making a profound and lasting impact on the lives of people and families living in Belfast. Initiatives like QCAP demonstrate the effectiveness of positive community-academic partnership; reflecting how universities can fulfil their civic and social responsibilities and remain relevant to the needs of those who live, and learn, locally.