

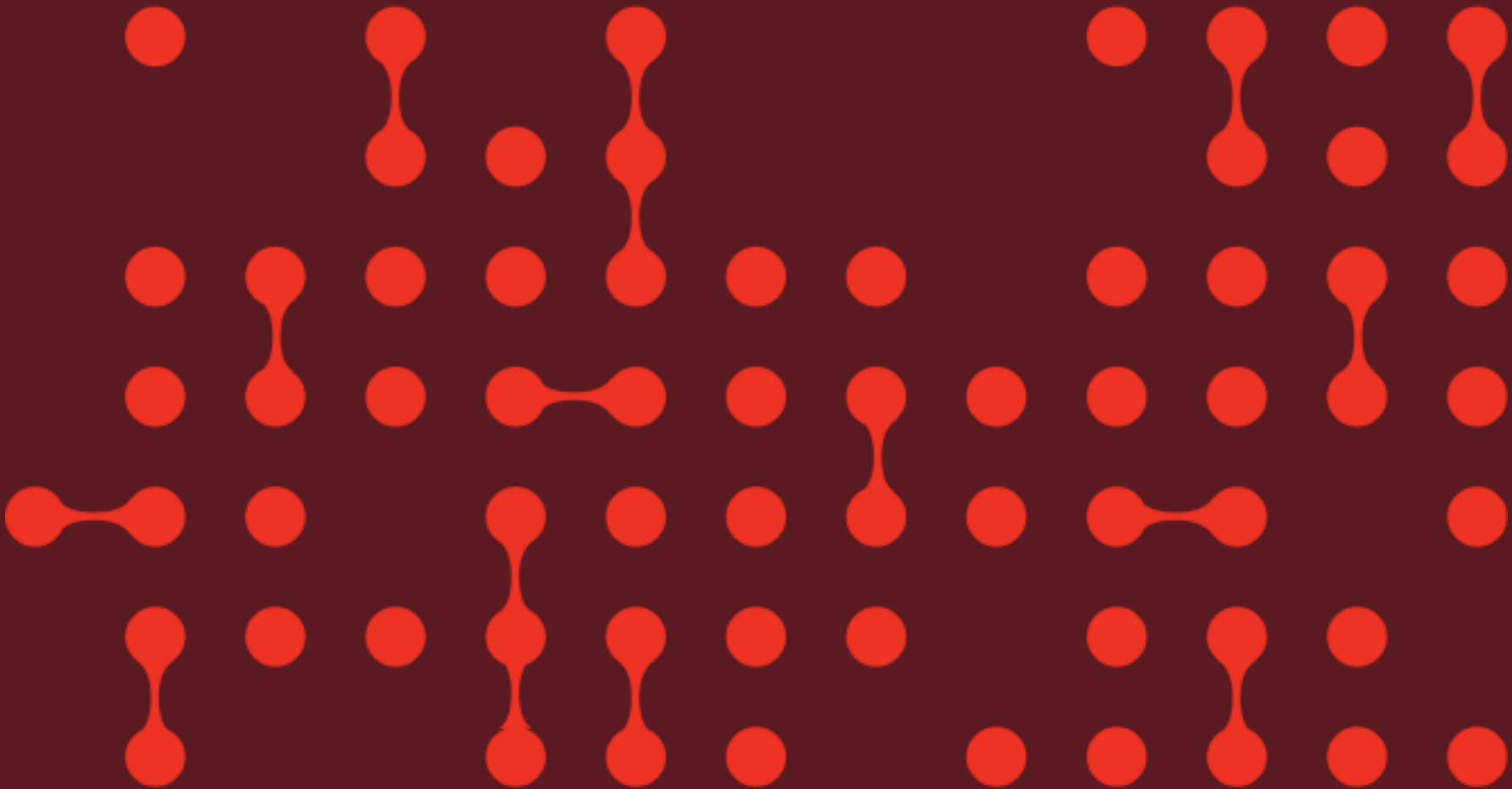
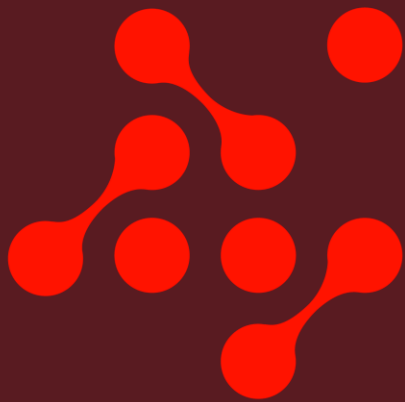
PartWiss 26 Spotlights | 1 July 2026

Public and Community Engagement with Research at Oxford

Dr Matthew Hickman | Head of Public and Community Engagement with Research | University of Oxford



**Public and
Community
Engagement
with Research**



Oxford and Public and Community Engagement with Research

Connect. Listen. Co-create. | What we are, and how I fit in

A devolved university

- Central University → four divisions → departments, each with significant autonomy
- Public engagement existed across Oxford long before any central function – divisions had engagement leads, departments ran their own projects.

Some recent centralisation

- A dedicated central team emerged around 2015, reducing duplication and building institution-wide capability
- My role (Research Services, Innovation & Engagement, since April 2022) sits within that function – I support and connect engagement, rather than doing it myself

Our 2024–2029 strategy

Vision: a university where responsible and purposeful engagement with communities and the public is integral to our research, driving collaboration and creating positive change.

1. nurture the engagement environment: define, integrate, connect, steward;
2. improve engagement practice: engage with communities, engage responsibly

A world of bigger differences

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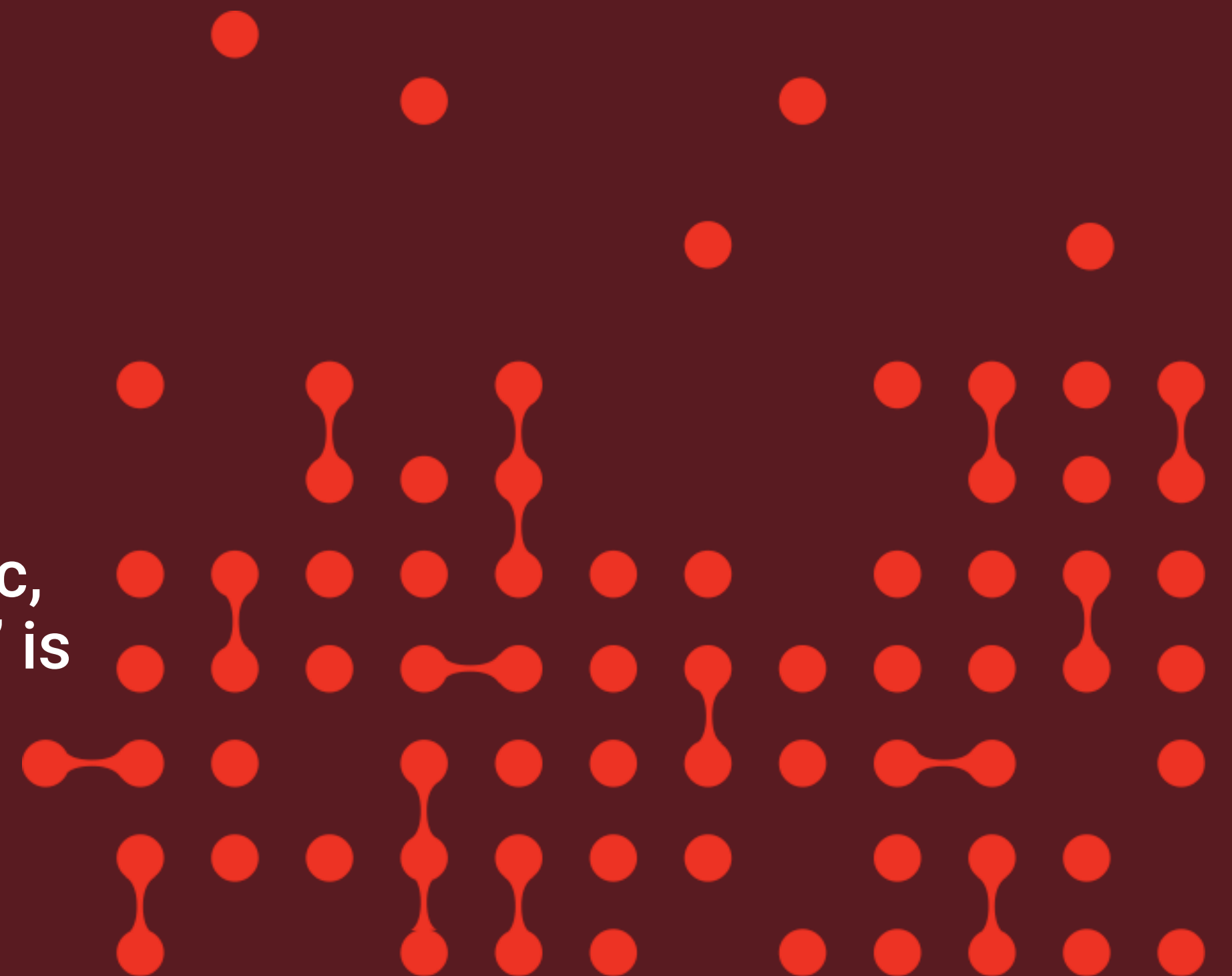


Public engagement in UK research: how we got here

- 1985 [Bodmer Report](#) (deficit model)
- 2000 House of Lords “[Science and Society](#)” (shift to dialogue)
- 2008 [NCCPE](#) founded
- 2014 [REF](#): societal impact introduced at 20%
- 2019 [Knowledge Exchange Framework](#)
- 2021 REF: impact rises to 25%
- [2029 REF](#): ‘Engagement & Impact’ (25%) — broader scope, co-production explicitly valued

The direction of travel: from scientists communicating at the public, to dialogue, to co-production. NB: REF’s definition of ‘engagement’ is broader than ‘public engagement’ alone.

A world of bigger differences



From audiences to communities

A shift in mindset, not just vocabulary

From 'the public' (and 'audiences')...

Public engagement has long thought in terms of audiences — people to be reached, informed, or invited to take part in something the University has already designed.

...to communities

Naming “community engagement” alongside public engagement pushes the mindset further: from people who receive research, to groups who hold standing, relationships, and their own knowledge — people research is done with, not just for.

It also surfaces relationship questions audience-thinking tends to miss — over-saturation, whose voice is centred, and what is owed back once a project ends.

Four kinds of community

Our strategy sets out four overlapping kinds, deliberately not restricted to geography:

- **Place** — people who live geographically near each other
- **Experience** — a shared significant life experience
- **Identity** — a shared identity, e.g. sex/gender, ethnicity
- **Practice** — people who do a similar thing, professionally or for enjoyment

These inevitably intersect — and naming them this way is itself a small act of co-production: it borrows from how communities understand themselves, rather than imposing a single administrative category.

Inform and inspire <> Consult <> Collaborate

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What PCER looks like in practice at Oxford

Examples from across the spectrum

Community History Project

History Faculty partnerships with community historians in Oxford – including the Afrikan Caribbean Kultral Heritage Initiative and the Museum of Oxford. Mutual knowledge exchange, not outreach.

Co-produced patient research

Research on recurrent vulvovaginal pain co-produced with patients, shaping NHS care pathways, clinical guidelines, and parliamentary policy. Winner of the [Vice-Chancellor's Award](#) 2025.

Borders, Mobility & Livelihoods

Mixed-method research with refugees on cross-border mobility in East Africa, co-produced with affected communities. Policy impacts at local, national and international levels. Oxford Dept of International Development.

Blenheim Palace partnership

Data-led approach to restoring the 300-year-old palace: engineering and heritage research applied to a real-world conservation challenge, in partnership with the estate. A knowledge exchange model where practice shapes the research agenda.

The scale

At any time, 100+ externally funded projects at Oxford include PCER costs – and that undercounts activity.

My role – and my team's – is to support, connect, and improve that ecosystem; not to run it centrally.

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PCER and transdisciplinary research

Different words, shared intent? Transdisciplinary research is not a term we typically use at Oxford — but the underlying practices overlap significantly

The language we use

In UK research, you are more likely to hear: public and community engagement, patient and public involvement (PPI/PPIE), participatory research, co-production, co-design, community-based research.

Where they converge

The core commitments are recognisably similar: reciprocity between academic and non-academic knowledge; involving communities from question-setting, not just data collection; research shaped by — not just reported to — those affected by it. The difference may be less about intent and more about which disciplinary tradition and institutional context you are working in.

An open question

Is transdisciplinary research a distinct practice — or an alternative lexicon for things the UK research system already does under different names? That feels like a useful question for today's discussion.

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For more information please contact

Dr Matthew Hickman
Head of Public and Community
Engagement with Research

Email: matthew.hickman@admin.ox.ac.uk

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