



Coffee Shops, Classrooms and Conversations: public engagement and outreach in a large interdisciplinary research Hub

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Public engagement and outreach activities are increasingly using specialist staff for co-ordination, training and support for researchers, they are also becoming expected for large investments. Here, the experience of public engagement and outreach a large, interdisciplinary Research Hub is described.

dot.rural, based at the University of Aberdeen UK, is a £11.8 million Research Councils UK Rural Digital Economy Hub, funded as part of the RCUK Digital Economy Theme (2009-2015). Digital Economy research aims to realise the transformational impact of digital technologies on aspects of the environment, community life, cultural experiences, future society, and the economy. The dot.rural Hub involves 92 researchers from 12 different disciplines, including Geography, Hydrology and Ecology. Public Engagement and Outreach is embedded in the dot.rural Digital Economy Hub via an Outreach Officer. Alongside this position, public engagement and outreach activities are compulsory part of PhD student contracts.

Public Engagement and Outreach activities at the dot.rural Hub involve individuals and groups in both formal and informal settings organised by dot.rural and other organisations. Activities in the realms of Education, Public Engagement, Traditional and Social Media are determined by a set of Underlying Principles designed for the Hub by the Outreach Officer. The underlying Engagement and Outreach principles match funding agency requirements and expectations alongside researcher demands and the user-led nature of Digital Economy Research. All activities include researchers alongside the Outreach Officer are research informed and embedded into specific projects that form the Hub. Successful public engagement activities have included participation in Café Scientifique series, workshops in primary and secondary schools, and online activities such as I'm a Scientist Get Me Out of Here.

From how to engage 8 year olds with making hydrographs more understandable to members of the public to blogging birds and engaging with remote, rural communities to Spiegeltents. This presentation will share successful public engagement and outreach events alongside some less successful experiences and lessons learnt along the way.