



# Healthy Universities for Healthy Communities: Bridging the Divide

Authors: Judith Sixsmith, Linda McSwiggan and Mei Lan Fang



University  
of Dundee



Healthy  
Universities for  
Healthy  
Communities



scottish universities  
insight institute  
mobilising knowledge for a better Scotland



# Foreward

The Health Promoting Universities movement continues to mature. Universities have a unique opportunity to be societal leaders in promoting healthy settings for people to learn, work, play and love – recognizing that “health is created and lived by people within the settings of everyday life.” (World Health Organisation, 1986)

The movement is growing nationally and internationally with Higher Education networks – including the UK Healthy Universities Network, the Canadian Health Promoting Campuses Network, and most recently, the Scottish Healthy Universities Network (as part of the UK Healthy Universities Network). Together, this forms a firm basis for universities to collaborate on how to improve the health and wellbeing of students, staff, and local communities.

In 2015, the University of British Columbia in Canada co-hosted the International Conference on Health Promoting Universities and Colleges, bringing together participants from 45 countries representing both educational institutions and health organizations, including the World Health Organization and UNESCO.

Following months of pre-consultation and three days of vigorous discussion at the Conference, the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges was born. The Charter states:

“Health promoting universities and colleges transform the health and sustainability of our current and future societies, strengthen communities and contribute to the well-being of people, places and the planet.”

Aligned with this vision, the ‘Healthy Universities for Health Communities’ project has focused on bringing together diverse perspectives to co-create ways to improve the health and wellbeing of Scottish people using a community-informed and community-led approach. Too often, health is held within the university sector, but to be truly effective, the conversation should be elevated and owned by everyone including: third sector and voluntary organisations, local businesses and service providers, as well as those who live in the community.

Universities have a unique opportunity to act as test beds for health and wellbeing promotion solutions on their campus settings with sizable populations, and also act as agents of change within their communities. We are seeing post-secondary institutions inspire and catalyze new health promotion efforts at a remarkable pace. Yet, much more can be done to research and share what aspects are working well, both among universities and with communities.

A first step towards this achieving goal was demonstrated by the Healthy Universities for Healthy Communities initiative. I am very encouraged by the important findings showcased in this report generated through community-focused knowledge co-production efforts. All of us can benefit from sharing knowledge and building on each other’s strengths, and collectively, we can work to engage higher education institutions to advance the health-promoting universities and colleges movement integrating important insight from local communities.

~ Matt Dolf, Wellbeing Director, Office of the Vice-President, Students, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

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# Healthy Universities for Healthy Communities

## The Healthy Universities Approach

**The Healthy Universities approach recognises that “health is created and lived by people within the settings of everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love” (WHO, 1986). Through embedding a commitment to health within its core business and strategic and operational management, a Healthy University seeks to create an organisational culture and learning, working and living environments that support the wellbeing of students, staff and the wider community – thereby enhancing its institutional performance and productivity. (Dooris et al, 2018a)**

## UK Healthy Universities Network<sup>1</sup>

The UK Healthy Universities Network was established in 2006 in response to growing demand from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) interested in developing and implementing the Healthy Universities approach (Department of Health, 2004). While universities had, for many years, delivered interventions in support of student and staff health, there was increased appreciation that comprehensive, co-ordinated and cross-institution approaches are more likely to achieve sustained benefits.

The Network’s vision is to build a strong movement of universities committed to creating health-enhancing cultures and environments; and enabling people to achieve their full potential. The Network aims to facilitate peer support, share information and guidance, advocate for Healthy Universities and encourage research and development. The Network is a signatory to the 2015 Okanagan International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges and requires its members to commit to its vision and principles.

Following publication of the Charter, an International Steering Group of Health Promoting Universities and Colleges was established, with a remit to support international networking and facilitate the Charter’s implementation. This has representation from 12 national/cross-country networks spanning five continents and is currently chaired by Professor Mark Dooris from the UK Network.

## Scottish Healthy Universities Network

The establishment of a Scottish Healthy Universities Network, as part of the UK Healthy Universities Network has been a recent development, with 14 of Scotland’s 19 universities having met regularly over the past two years to share best practice and establish

future priorities around promoting physical and mental health and wellbeing within their communities.

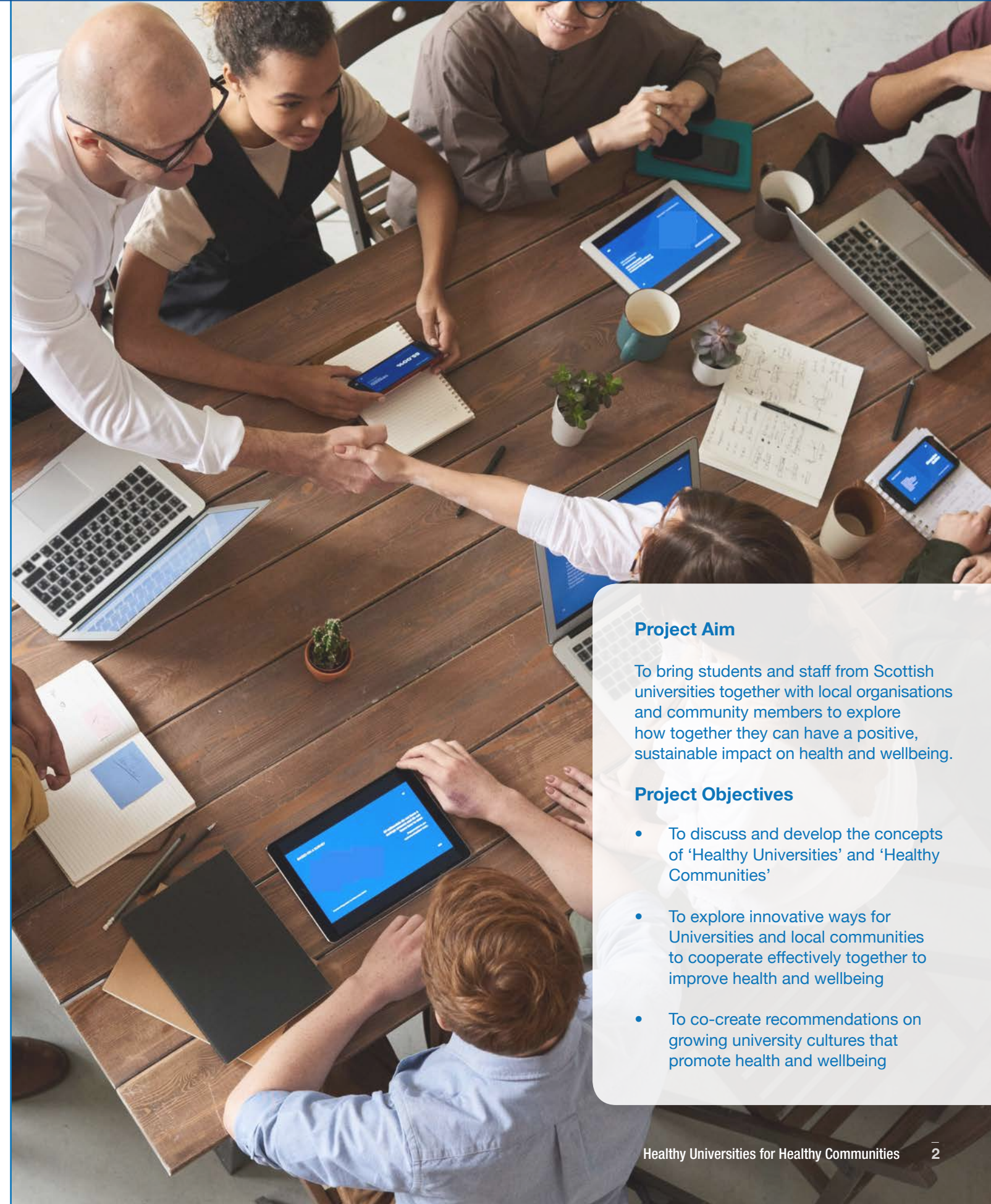
## The Project

The Health Universities for Healthy Communities project brings students and staff from Scottish universities together with voluntary and community sector organisations and members of the local community to explore how we can work towards improving the health and wellbeing of Scottish people.

This project aims to create better understandings of how universities can promote and support health and wellbeing where we learn, work, live, and play. To achieve this goal requires collective efforts from key stakeholders (community members, community leaders, third sector services, students, academic and professional services staff, policy makers, designers, and health and social care service providers) to co-create practical ideas alongside recommendations for policy and practice, based on current evidence and the experiences of those involved.

This important work will help to identify organisational strengths across Scottish universities in a variety of contexts and urban/rural settings, and areas for development led by local communities. The project team, in partnership with a diversity of stakeholders, facilitated knowledge generation around embedding healthy universities in cooperative, interdependent relationships with their communities to inform decision-making in relation to health and wellbeing policies and strategies.

This created opportunities for critical dialogue to promote different ways of working together, foster innovation in everyday health and wellbeing contexts, while strengthening the cooperative efforts, impact and reach of Scottish universities.



## Project Aim

To bring students and staff from Scottish universities together with local organisations and community members to explore how together they can have a positive, sustainable impact on health and wellbeing.

## Project Objectives

- To discuss and develop the concepts of ‘Healthy Universities’ and ‘Healthy Communities’
- To explore innovative ways for Universities and local communities to cooperate effectively together to improve health and wellbeing
- To co-create recommendations on growing university cultures that promote health and wellbeing

1. Much of this section is credited to “Dooris, M. (2019) UK & Ireland Healthy Universities Summit Briefing Paper. London, Wednesday 22nd May 2019. Preston: UK Healthy Universities Network.”



# What we did

## Workshop 1

**Knowledge Café: Health and wellbeing relationships between university and community** | May 30, 2019 in Dundee

Thirty-two participants covering community residents, community organisations, university staff and students attended the Café in a community venue. The room was organised into eight café style tables with 4-6 people per table. A case study stimuli description was then presented and discussed at the tables to identify what were the key health and wellbeing issues that universities and communities could work on together and what were the problems and opportunities presented by such joint working. Each table had a discussion facilitator and a note taker, and discussions were digitally recorded. Once the first case study had been discussed, a further case study was then introduced for discussion. In this way, four case studies were discussed. The case studies were centred on: environment and transportation, youth group identity branding, disability and participation of experts by experience and sport, and health and wellbeing.

## Workshop 2

**Dialogue: Visioning cross university and community practice** | June 25, 2019 in Edinburgh

Participants (n=18) at this community based dialogue event represented University staff and students alongside community organisations. Five facilitated tables were set out with dialogue materials and two rounds of discussion were held. In the first round, five issues derived from the Dundee Knowledge Café (one per table) from the perspective of University relationships with the community were discussed. A feedback session then shared knowledge from each table. In the second round, five issues from the perspectives of community engagement with universities were discussed and again knowledge was shared in a post round feedback session.

## Workshop 3

**Dialogue: Policy and practice recommendations** | July 27, 2019 in Glasgow

Ten participants comprising University staff, student and community organisations attended the third workshop event. At a University venue, four facilitated tables were set out with materials designed to stimulate discussion around the development of policy and practice recommendations. Each table discussed issues deriving from the analysis of workshop 2 data and noted policy and practice recommendations. Each recommendation was written on a separate sheet and affixed to the wall. Finally, participants were given three votes to identify the recommendations they felt should be prioritised. The top eight recommendations were then collected together and participants again voted on which they felt were most important.

## Workshop 4

**Discussion: Rural and remote perspectives** | November 25, 2019 in Elgin

To gather information on the ways in which universities and communities could most effectively work together to promote health and wellbeing in rural and remote locations, the Healthy Universities for Healthy Communities team organised a focus group discussion in Elgin at the Moray College University of Highlands and Islands with eight members of the community involving: University instructors (3), University student support manager (1), student representative and founder of the university student peer support group (1) as well as members of the local NHS (2) and Job Centre (1). The focus group discussion prioritised the implications of living in rural and remote locations in terms of the possibilities, challenges and benefits of university-community collaborations to promote health and wellbeing.

The Healthy Universities for Healthy Communities team conducted four Knowledge Café and Dialogue Events over eight months between May and November 2019, followed by a final Showcase event in December 2019. The events were held in Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Elgin in the Scottish Highlands. All events were organised by first presenting information on the UK/Scottish Universities Network, then aims, objectives and data on the project, workshop activities and finally an open forum discussion. A photographic exhibition was held at each event in which team members and subsequently workshop participants, were requested to take photographs which they felt captured some aspect of health and wellbeing relationships (positive or negative) between universities and communities. They provided captions to their photographs explaining their thoughts. Event participants were encouraged to discuss the photographs and to use post-it notes to provide their own thoughts on the photos and their captions.

*'Green goodness facilitates physical activity, relaxation and very importantly, a refuge from loud spaces.'*

Members of the travelling community, students and the third sector service, Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project (MECOPP), working together on campus with Mark Traynor, Performance Director. The resultant performance of a Forum Theatre to address the challenges of accessing health and social care was inspirational and impactful.



# What is a Healthy University?

When considering what people think a Healthy University is, workshop participants mentioned:

- Inclusive/Diverse populations safe, accepted and valued
- Care and concern with health and wellbeing including mental health issues experienced by students and staff
- Care and concern regarding people with learning disabilities
- Interesting, open and caring
- Proactive in developing and making accessible welcoming/comfortable places where local community residents can use facilities
- Open days/community facing/provide volunteering opportunities for students and staff in the local community
- Open to feedback from communities
- Employ local people
- Adopts a holistic view of its role
- Develops and leads partnerships
  - In research
  - For student placements
- A place that promotes healthy behaviours and lifestyles for all, including:
  - Sport, exercise and activity
  - Activity for people with mobility issues
  - Fresh food
  - Sexual health
  - Alcohol awareness without spoiling 'fun'
  - Health conscious around physical and mental health and wellbeing
  - Does not just focus on staff in terms of the work they do
- Conducts research into pressing local issues
- Gets involved in making a positive social impact via:
  - Making sure research gets taken up to address local challenges
  - Ensures students work with local people on improving local area and services in co-production for relevant social benefits
- A place of freedom to express/challenge conventions
- Communicates its messages well and works together in joint ownership of knowledge co-production.

Participants felt that to become a healthy university requires a culture change towards grappling with multidimensional factors from organisational commitment, lifestyle choices, engaging with local concerns and accessibility for all. Key concerns revolved around the mental health of students, particularly in relation to the frequency of suicide. At the same time, there was a feeling of changing student awareness of how to develop and maintain their wellbeing.

***'There's been a huge sort of increase in the safety of young women on the campus, or just off the campus and now they're employing people, apparently, to make sure that they get back from the pub safely and all this. Why should we get to that point? Why should it be like that?'***

*~ Edinburgh Event Table*

***'So, not just this drinking culture, because there's a lot of peer pressure, I've noticed, amongst the young women, particularly. [...] I've spoken to a lot of the young students, they said "well I don't really like it but my friends our going, we feel we have to go otherwise we're left out." It's that feeling of the fear of missing out, the FOMO thing.'***

*~ Dundee Event Table*

***'So, like, for example, if you're looking at (health and wellbeing). For example, a sexual health unit, you know, which being placed with the university, so... Which would mean healthy students, which would also mean healthy communities around, you know, because the students are going to be ambassadors, they are going to be the ones who are part of the wider community inside and outside the university.'***

*~ Glasgow Event Table*

***'I sometimes think universities recently have quite bad press in terms of the number of suicides, the number increasing... so the mental health among young people and I think maybe one of the problems though is that the focus is starting to become so student orientated because of these fears that maybe we're forgetting...'***

*~ Edinburgh Event Table*

# What is a Healthy Community?

In terms of community, discussion revolved around diversity and difference at the local, geographical level, but always focused on people rather than geography and also communities of interest.

According to participants in the workshops, a healthy community is complex, made up of numerous different factors and is essentially:

- Inclusive
- Made of diverse groups getting along together
- Offers Employment
- Open to developing partnerships to sustain communities
- Provides opportunities to influence decision making so local people feel in control
- A place where people help each other
- A place of familiarity and belonging including communities of interest
- Communicates what is going on
- Promotes connectedness between people
- Access to services
- Affordable housing/transport
- Green space
- Safe spaces
- Places to connect people
- A place of recreation and learning

In summary, a healthy community for the participants meant a familiar space, where people felt a sense of belonging and support in terms of being included regardless of identity, offers of employment and availability of housing. They felt that a healthy community has green and safe spaces and means of facilitating recreation, learning and connection between people.



***'The University provides one of the few green spaces heading into the shopping area. This reminds me of the need for green lungs in our communities but also increases my wellbeing as I walk and enjoy the aesthetics of the natural environment amongst the hard architecture.'***

***'A healthy university should be one that doesn't get seen as the experts. The experts divide is ... I think is the one that I'm sort of wary of. Not going into the communities to do research, only communities, but a university that goes on to do the research with the communities.'***

*~ Edinburgh Event Table*

***'Community to me is how many other different groups of people there are. Because there are many communities within a community here, as far as I'm concerned. I'm just talking about Dundee.'***

*~ Dundee Event Table*

***'I think people looking out for each other. I think like a lot ... years ago everybody knew everybody and they knew ... you looked out for your neighbour whereas now I think people are less likely to know who's right next door to them.'***

*~ Edinburgh Event Table*

***'Room space, where you've got things like affordable access to transport and accessible amenities for recreation and learning... and fun... access to services, health services or other services. But I also think it's something about feeling empowered and actually in control, influencing decisions in your community.'***

*~ Edinburgh Event Table*

***'...Not being afraid to say hello or it's not being able ... afraid to ask for something or to ... not afraid to get to know one another. I think that's what I think a healthy community is.'***

*~ Edinburgh Event Table*

**Knowledge Cafés** are used to enable different stakeholders with a range of expertise relevant to the topic area to gather around a series of cabaret style tables to engage in open, facilitated discussions in an informal, comfortable setting with the aim of sharing knowledge, enabling joint learning and developing innovative ways of thinking (Aldred, 2009). In the Dundee knowledge café event, conversations were structured by an initial reading of case studies. Participants then discussed the positive and negative aspects of university-community collaborations around the promotion of health and wellbeing. Discussions were digitally recorded and subsequently subject to a framework thematic analysis (Gale et al., 2013). The analysis pointed to the challenges as well as benefits of such collaborations and several examples of collaborations were identified.

### Challenges of University-community collaborations

Conversations at tables in the knowledge café event highlighted a number of challenges to the health and wellbeing relationship between university and community. These challenges included concerns around accessibility, accommodation, constructive communication, financial limitations, power imbalances and safety issues.

Participants maintained that some collaborations are for the purposes of the University meeting the criteria set out in policies. When the wellbeing of both the university and community is however a pivotal aspect of the agenda, the outcome is likely to be more positive, particularly in terms of the health and wellbeing relationships between the university and community.

*'And [the University] have to tick some boxes like linking up with policy or, you know, linking up with communities to show that their research is having an impact. Which I think, you know, that's a good thing to do but actually what you are trying to do with this is have benefits for the university in terms of health and wellbeing, it's not about the research. It could also be the university and also for the outside community as well.'*

One group in Glasgow initially suggested that the wellbeing label can prevent community and university individuals from benefitting from events that can combine these cohorts with a mutual aim to benefit their wellbeing.



### The benefits of University-Community Collaborations

**F1:** *'It's about having a good, a good mix of like inviting people in and making things available in the community, isn't it? Sometimes I wonder with health and wellbeing though is how you label it as well because sometimes a health and wellbeing label can put people off coming to... Even though it is about health and wellbeing... I'm thinking about health and wellbeing very generally, you know, [...] It's doing something which you enjoy doing it and get something out of it, which means libraries, reading clubs, could well be made available.'*

**F2:** *'And bringing people together, I assume there's lots of students who feel very lonely, homesick and a bit conservative of people with similar interests, bringing them to get there...'*

- Devoting a percentage of lecturer's time within their contracts to voluntary work
- An established representative from university to third sector networks who can reach out more easily and build positive relationships to increase conversations and feedback

*'I volunteer here of my own volition and, actually thinking about it, there are a few incentives to volunteer, like within universities. But they are more incentives, rather than requirements. [...] And, to me, that is an obvious route in to the university itself sharing in the community, and the community itself getting to know about the university.'*

Examples of successful university-community collaborations:

### Sexual Health Kits Project

The provision of sexual health kits is considered an example of a 'beautiful collaboration' between university and community. Both the University and organisations in the community provide such kits where there are toilet facilities, sanitary products like tampons and pads as part of an end period poverty movement. These products are freely available.

### Short film-making collaboration

Edinburgh College was approached by a community organisation for help from students on a short film-making course with the aim of making short films to educate young people about tobacco issues. They were really pleased with the work that was produced and the arrangement overall benefitted both the organisation and college students. Students gained experience of working with a real client rather than on fictional project work and the community organisation gained good quality, affordable films when compared with the cost of using a professional company.

### Art college exhibitions and school trips

Art college exhibitions were considered a very positive source of university-community engagement. The exhibitions and productions held attracted members of the general public and were the inspiration of school trips, in turn inspiring school students to be creative themselves. The University opened its doors to the local community enabling schools and community residents to share their resources and learn more about University life.



### Volunteering

The use of voluntary work was regarded highly, particularly given the extent to which it can benefit not only the recipients, but also the development of relationships between university and community. Other suggestions on how voluntary work can be taken advantage of in this capacity included:

- Students adding to their CVs that they have been on placements working with older people and more vulnerable members of the community
- Students providing entertainment ... ('it doesn't need to be heavy, laboring stuff...', one participant said)



## Workshop 2:

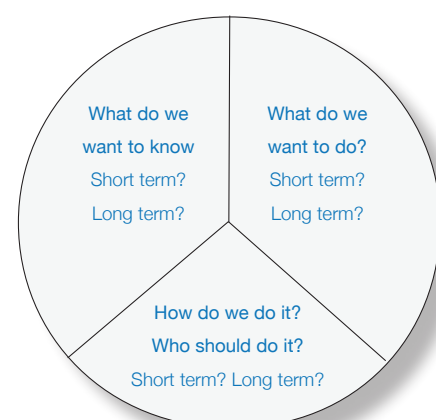
### Visioning across university and community practice

**Workshop dialogues are designed to support stakeholders with different expertise and perspectives to work together on a problem focused on jointly discussing and devising agreed upon answers to open ended questions. A facilitator ensures that discussion stay focused on the topic at hand and that everyone's voice is heard. The visioning dialogue workshop held in Edinburgh was organised around the issues identified in workshop one. The first visioning round dealt with the challenges listed in the first graph on page 7.**

Each table had a different issue and they discussed three key areas relating to that issue, namely:

- What do we want to do about this issue in the short and long term
- How do we do it and who should be involved
- What do we want/need to know to address this issue successfully

**Visioning Round 1:**  
University-Based issues

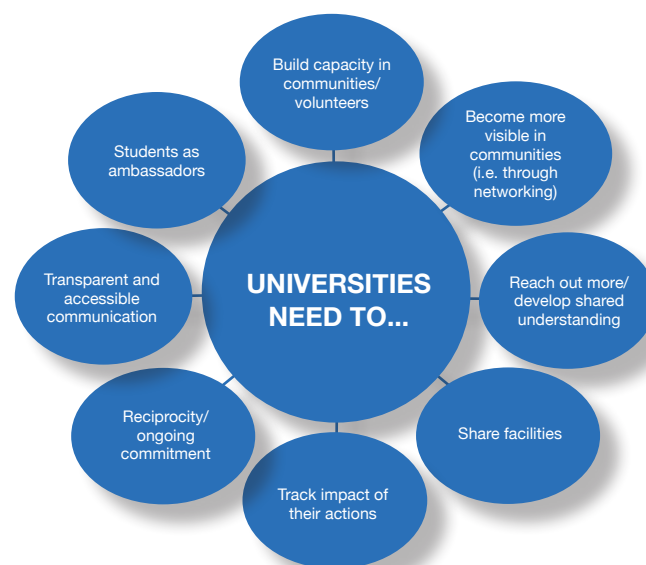


Post-it notes were used to capture key discussion points after such points were agreed on. Once all discussion was exhausted, further issues were presented to each table in the second visioning round:

- How to establish effective two-way communication channels
- Researcher (especially early career) precarity makes community engagement difficult
- How to connect community issues to university students and staff
- Where should the focus be for joint projects
- What do communities get out of University based collaborations and vice versa

The discussions were digitally recorded and subject to framework thematic analysis.

The key messages derived through the thematic analysis are captured below:



Two distinct themes were generated through the thematic analysis: (i) inclusivity and (ii) developing and maintaining strong relationships.

#### Inclusivity

- Achieved through activities - i.e. community learning opportunities; campaigns (e.g. wellbeing week)
- There needs to be appreciation of multi-faceted layers of community with regards to diversity
- There is a need to reach out to communities from the University. Individuals with vulnerabilities and from hard to reach communities are far less likely than most to walk onto campus.
- Seldom heard groups often feel that 'even if I'm heard, people aren't listening to me'
- There is a need to bring people together with a shared purpose or goal
- There needs to be a designated social justice issue for each University to tackle (i.e. climate change, homelessness, mental health awareness)

One example of where inclusivity was discussed was at a Dundee event table. The feeling for one participant was that various mechanisms in place to enable inclusivity need to be administered in a manner that engages communities in the right way.

*'...the issue of inclusivity and thinking about different forms of reaching out to communities and social impact assessments, equality assessments and, more recently, diversity and inclusive impact assessments. And the role of the university in using these things in a way that will engage communities in the right way; so, using those sorts of resources to engage communities in the right way.'*

#### Developing and Maintaining Strong Relationships

- We need to maintain continuity in our relationships and communications if we are to create sustainable university and community collaborations
- Have some agreement in the beginning to work together, then build the agreement through processes of continuity i.e. communication, connection, building a network to help make it self-sustaining
- Jointly develop a visionary, mission statement that people believe in, so that it's sustained based on the collective 'passion' of people
- Bring people together for a shared purpose or goal
- Manage community expectations, feedback to them on progress and the impact of their contributions, developing a genuine partnership
- Develop co-creation values and mechanisms to sustain University-Community relationships

At the same time as participants acknowledged the importance of relationships in this capacity, there was also an awareness that collaborations must not be wholly dependent on these relationships because if an individual were to leave a position, collaborations would ideally continue. 'How do we build them in ways which provide the mechanisms for this sustainability so that they're not dependent on personal relationships because as soon as somebody leaves that partnership can fall apart...'

A crucial message to universities in terms of building relationships with communities was summed up by one participant:

*'Instead of saying, "Look we're from the university and this is what we're doing." It's kind of taking that barrier away straight away saying like, "OK, how can we learn from you and how can we then use the skills that you're talking about? So, if we've got some skills this is what we could potentially help you with and just make good connections with one another." I think that's the thing, if you can make a connection with somebody at an organisation then that's the first step, isn't it?'*

The analysis identified that Universities need to achieve several goals to better enable University-Community collaborations. With regards to inclusivity, there needs to be an appreciation of the multifaceted layers of communities and Universities alike. And without maintaining continuity in relationships and communications, such collaborations would be difficult to achieve and sustain.



*'As a recreational and commuter cyclist I think the University is showing the way for Dundee City to take note that exercise and reducing traffic pollution is now a necessity, not a luxury, to keep our local communities healthy in terms of the air we breathe. The presence of bike racks sends a message to everyone that keeping active is important to our health and wellbeing.'*



Workshop 3: Policy and practice recommendations

**This workshop was designed to encourage discussion around the development of policy and practice recommendations. Each table discussed issues deriving from the analysis of workshop 2 data and noted policy and practice recommendations. Policy recommendations included long term approaches to building collaborative relationships; a transdisciplinary approach; and active collaborations between universities’ health and social care partnerships.**

Participants felt that policies need to be in place within the University that actively encourage efforts to support students’ health and wellbeing.

**Practice recommendation**

Participants recommended a variety of practices within the University context to best support a collaborative approach to supporting health and wellbeing in both contexts:

They also felt that there should be encouragement for health and wellbeing practices, for instance, cycling to work, a daily mile walk, lunch time walks, reduced gym membership fees and having mental health and health practitioners within university. The presence of Community reps could also ensure members of the community are represented on university committees to be able to raise issues and influence. Similarly, another participant suggested that:

*‘Align more closely in collaborative way with community/LA health and wellbeing policies in practice to make a practical contribution.’*

*‘I would have thought the best place to start’s by opening your doors and bringing people into you and showing them that it’s not a scary separate place that you’re not welcome and that kind of thing.’*

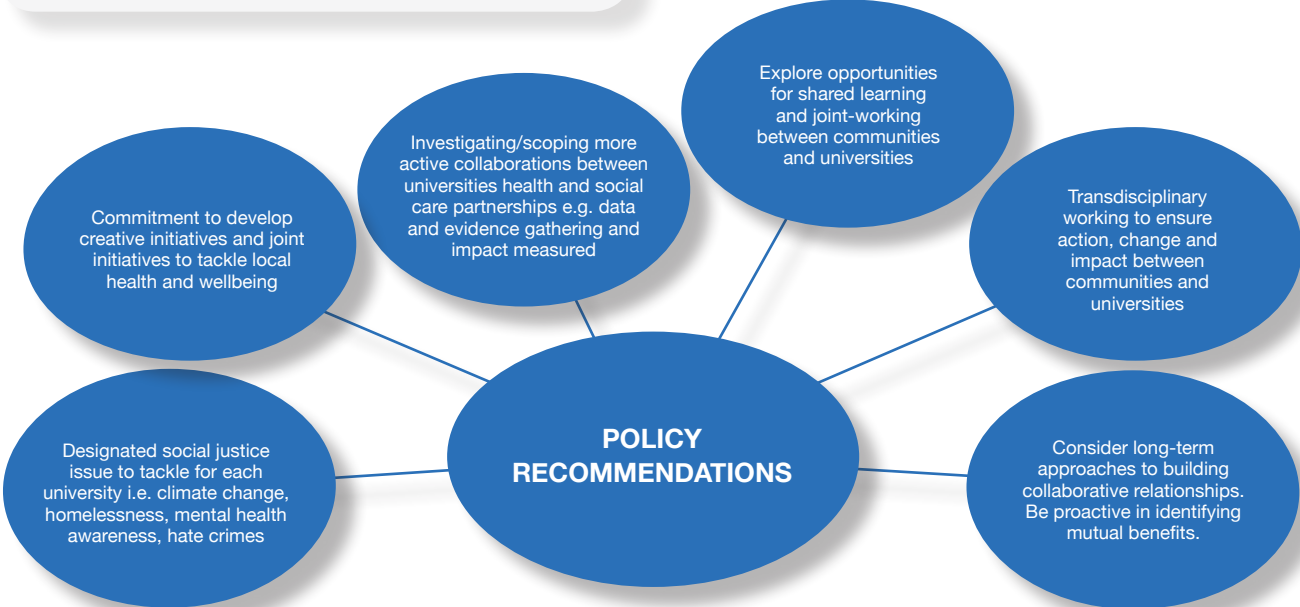
*‘Community reps to lobby the university about issues that are important to them and affect them.’*

Another suggestion was to be proactive in establishing teams that better represent diversity:

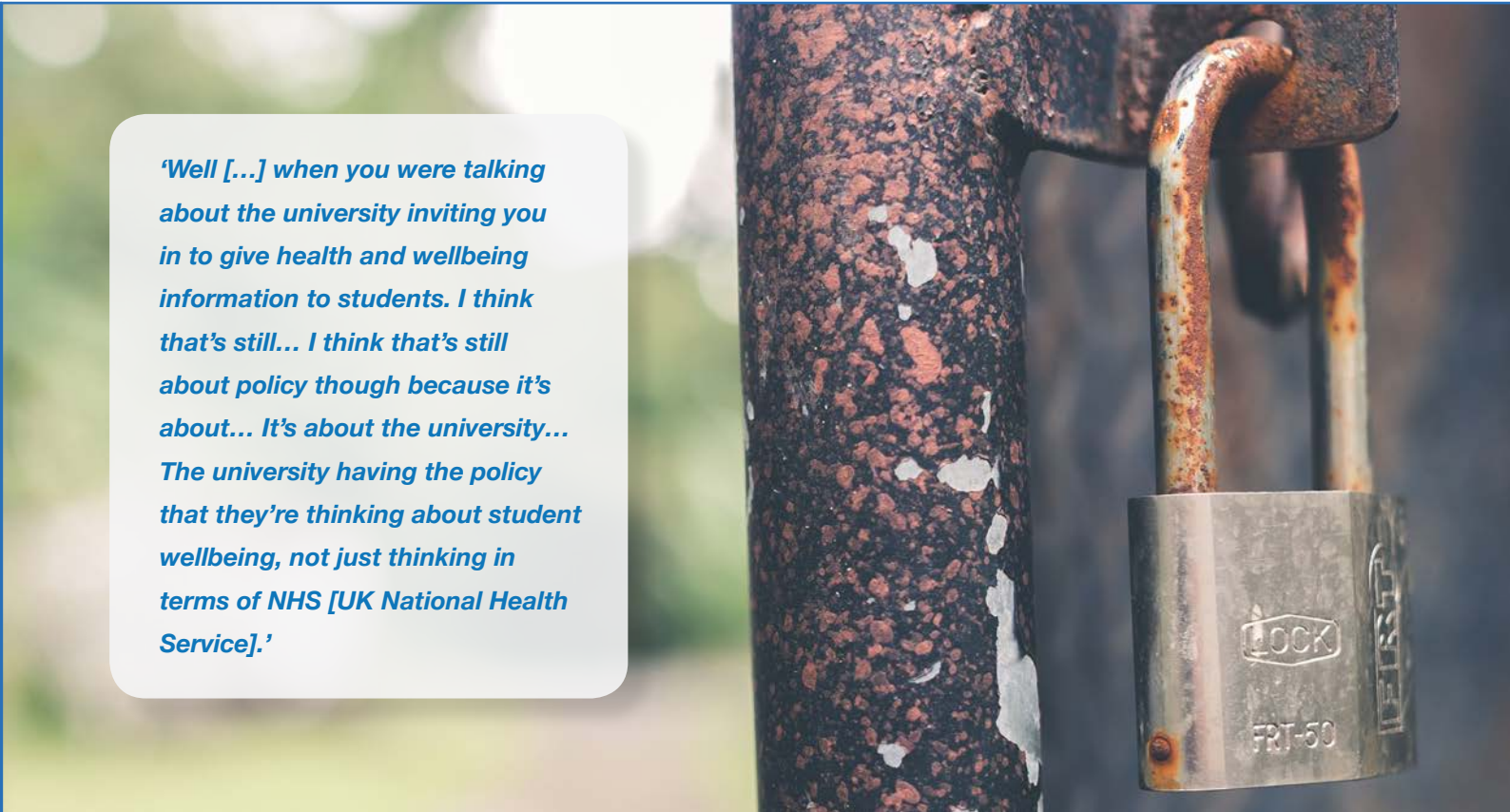
*‘That’s where I guess we need to sort a team up with the local community groups and different third sector groups who, you know, have those contacts and say, “Look, this is happening, it may be in a university setting but it’s something that’s relevant that you might be interested in,” and then you would get a bit more diverse range of people coming in rather you see like it’s always kind of going to the people that already know about it.’*

Finally, one participant stated that it ‘doesn’t even matter if it (university-community collaboration for health and wellbeing) has been actioned but it’s about getting people to even think about it – conscientisation’.

Some participants noted that these policy and practice recommendations may not be as applicable in rural contexts. This was considered in the final workshop.



*‘Well [...] when you were talking about the university inviting you in to give health and wellbeing information to students. I think that’s still... I think that’s still about policy though because it’s about... It’s about the university... The university having the policy that they’re thinking about student wellbeing, not just thinking in terms of NHS [UK National Health Service].’*





## Workshop 4: Rural and remote perspectives

Stakeholders who attended the knowledge café events in urban locations, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow raised concerns about reaching members of the community living, especially those who are seldom heard, in more rural and remote parts of Scotland.

*'I mean Glasgow has got such a huge student population that it features fairly regularly, which include discussions at the local authority level on how to involve young people and the student population in public health decisions, but will this be paralleled in a more rural authority area? Probably not.'*

A reoccurring point of discussion is the notion of social and relational distances generated by the urban/rural geographic divide, as it pertains to the Scottish Highlands and Islands and key urban areas in Scotland. To gain a better understanding of university health and wellbeing issues in more remote Scottish areas, the Healthy Universities for Healthy Communities team organised a focus group discussion in Elgin at the Moray College University of Highlands and Islands with eight members of the community involving: University instructors (3), University student support manager (1), student representative and founder of the university student peer support group (1) as well as members of the local NHS (2) and Job Centre (1). The focus group discussion prioritised the implications of living in rural and remote locations in terms of the possibilities, challenges and benefits of university-community collaborations to promote health and wellbeing.

Key health and wellbeing challenges identified by participants within the context of University settings include: limited and/or under-resourcing of extra-curricular activities for students and staff, and overworked staff members – both of which are interrelated and have contributed to poor mental and physical wellbeing of both staff and students. Staff members have limited capacity to engage in university activities that help to replenish their mental and physical health, and this subsequently leads to the inability to provide holistic supports and services for students, particularly, those experiencing depression and anxiety stemming from exam stress, loneliness and social isolation.

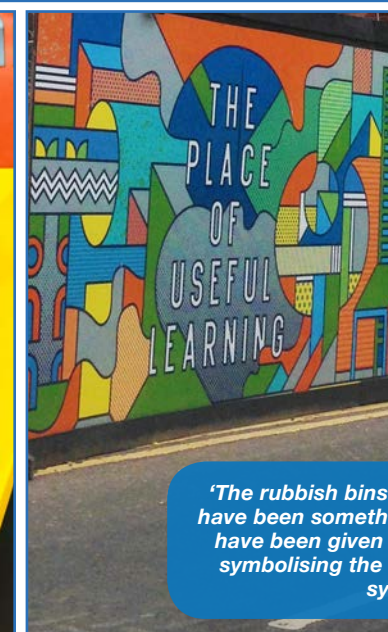
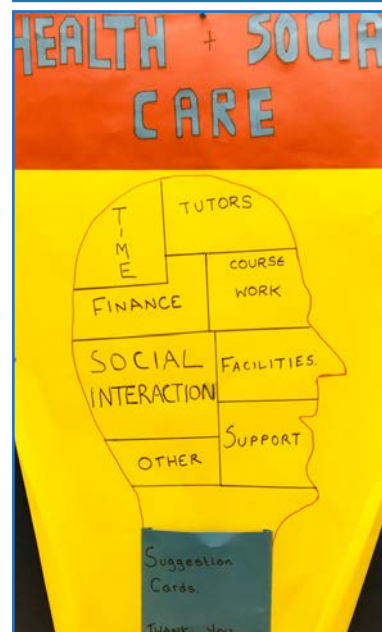
Key health and wellbeing challenges shaped by environmental barriers of living in more rural and remote contexts include: limited/inefficient public transportation (e.g. lengthy journeys and limited services - especially lack of provision in the evenings), and the difficulties of expressing mental health challenges and getting help when living in smaller communities where 'everyone knows everyone'. Students who live outside the periphery of the University in other villages can find it difficult to meet up with their university friends because of the distances involved. As well, the length of bus journeys is often longer than 1 hour, which makes it less enticing for students to spend more time in the university than necessary.

To address some of the challenges, key recommendations include, enhanced partnership working with local community organisations such as:

- Job Centre to develop young workforce
- Local organisations to work together to provide confidence boosting courses
- The NHS and the University to develop more wellbeing services for staff and students
- University food services to provide healthier food options
- Local recreation and leisure organisations to develop more opportunities for social participation and community engagement

University leaders to focus more on developing strategies to:

- Improve working conditions for staff,
- Create more specialised and sustained services for students and staff (e.g. healthy social media consumption, importance of sleep and diet, and mental health supports and coping strategies for loneliness and social isolation)
- Expand opportunities for local community residents to use the available university resources and facilities



*'The rubbish bins that line Perth Road where the shops are have been something of an eyesore on this street. Now they have been given a facelift with student artwork. Instead of symbolising the wastefulness of current society, they now symbolise art and creativity for community.'*



*'Bridging the divide - we have University campuses in Dundee and in Kirkcaldy. No matter which side of the River Tay you belong to, our communities are on this journey together.'*



*'This is a bench just off of the sidewalk on Perth Road. It creates a nice community feel and offers people to sit and observe the city. It's also helpful for people with mobility issues because it gives them a place to sit and take a break from walking.'*



# Guidelines and Recommendations

Drawing on feedback from university and community stakeholders, several guidelines and recommendations emerged that concern three key areas: (i) creating a power equilibrium, (ii) practical University ideas towards real world impact and (iii) inclusive and equitable communication.

## Creating a power equilibrium

Addressing the power imbalance between members of the university and local communities can be achieved through:

- *Creating opportunities for shared learning.* Developing publically available learning spaces in the shape of free public lectures, seminars and workshops held in University spaces (e.g. library, lecture rooms) can generate opportunities for social interaction between members of the university and the local community.
- *Enabling better communication mechanisms.* Our findings indicate that members of the community often feel their voices are less prioritised compared to academics during public discussions and public engagement meetings. Early involvement of university and community stakeholders in informal dialogue can help generate opportunities for establishing a shared understanding and common goals, which can help ameliorate misunderstandings and ultimately help tackle existing underlying tensions between members of the university and the local community.
- *Dispelling misperceptions and myths.* Workshop participants had expressed that often, members of the community perceive the University as an ivory tower and 'not for me'. Logistically and physically, universities are structured in a way that make resources less accessible to the public. Participants maintained that Universities have lost their sense of civic obligation. By making university facilities such as the library more accessible to the public, this will help members of the community feel more welcome and less intimidated to make good use of publically funded university spaces.

## Practical University ideas towards real world impact

*Pre-empting, optimising and synchronising agendas* so that people want to collaborate: 'The more you get people going because they're interested in the principles of it, rather than they have a specific problem, then you're going to get people thinking creatively, rather than going "I've got a car park proposed next to my house and I don't want it there." And that begins to change the discourse.'

Generating a pathway towards real world impact can be achieved practically through:

- Making active efforts to **invite communities** to engage in academic discussions and events
- Creating opportunities for input by **building safe spaces** to solicit open and honest feedback particularly from individuals and organisations (e.g. third sector) who are often negotiated out of the decision-making process
- Eliciting an **ongoing feedback forum** between staff member groups and between staff and students to ensure they have a safe communication outlet that enables them to discuss and provide input on their work and learning environments
- Organising **open spaces events** for students and communities to facilitate mutual knowledge sharing and exchange
- Co-developing **definitive work plans** to concretise the planning, preparing and actioning of real change to bridge the gap between communities and universities

## Inclusive and equitable communication

Enhancing collaborative relationships across a diversity of stakeholders can be facilitated by optimal, appropriate and equitable communication mechanisms such as:

- Ensuring that community representatives are **meaningfully represented** on university committees in order to raise awareness on important health and wellbeing issues and ultimately shape policy
- Encouraging **open and honest communication** about needs, aspirations and expectations, in that, if you don't ask then you don't get
- Offering **diverse mechanisms for communication** to extend the reach of learning opportunities and resources to people that are the most seldom heard and hardest to reach
- Communicating with the aim to help people to **understand and engage in diverse perspectives**
- Making active communication efforts to **maintain continuity** in university and community relationships if we are to create sustainable university and community collaborations

*'Often, the universities do hold the power and is the only one that is considered in any type of partnership. Given that this could immediately put off the partner, I think it's important to question your own intentions and listen to them.'*

*'Align is a good word. The health and social care partnership, the health board, local authorities all have plans for health and wellbeing. So, you know, it's about getting everyone singing from the same hymn sheet.'*



# Key Messages from Universities and Communities ——— References

## Key Message 1

Universities need to provide strong, but inclusive leadership to improve community health and wellbeing for students, staff and local communities.

## Key Message 2

We frequently ask how can universities benefit from community engagement but we should be asking what universities can offer to improve health and wellbeing of people living in the community that includes students, staff and people outside the university sector.

## Key Message 3

We need to ensure that active listening, inclusivity and mutual benefit, are at the heart of decision-making around health and wellbeing concerns to achieve more constructive and long lasting collaboration.

## Key Message 4

We need to develop meaningful university-community partnerships and we need to attend to unequal power dynamics between partners.

## Key Message 5

Universities could encourage more local community resident, student and staff engagement by opening up their resources and facilities to all.

## Key Message 6

We should ensure that student, staff and local community member issues are considered when drawing up university policy and practice.

## Key Message 7

Lastly, we need to all question our social responsibility.

## Concluding Remarks

Over the past 18 months, 14 of Scotland's 19 universities have met to share best practice and establish future priorities around promoting physical/mental health and wellbeing within their communities.

Early discussions indicate that each university has, to some extent, focused on staff and student health and wellbeing and established mutually beneficial relationships with sections of their local communities. However, widening co-operation between universities and people, and communities involves overcoming several barriers.

For example, power dynamics may exist between universities as large-scale employers in a local area where smaller community organisations depend on them for sustainability. In times of austerity, core organisational values may be prioritised over partnership working. Marginalised communities may have very different experiences of organising time in daily life and ideas of future, which are not always understood by universities and health care providers.

With support from the Scottish Universities Insight Institute, we hosted a series of engaging dialogue events in a proactive approach towards better understanding how we can bridge universities with communities to facilitate health and the health and wellbeing of Scottish people, students and staff, alongside communities, as a response to the rallying cry of the globally recognised Okanagan Charter.

This will simultaneously shape a collaborative research, learning and policy agenda, moving stakeholders from problem-solving to problem-finding and from individual to collaborative and interdependent engagement.

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## Project Leads



**Judith Sixsmith**

School of Nursing and Health Sciences  
University of Dundee  
j.sixsmith@dundee.ac.uk



**Linda McSwiggan**

School of Nursing and Health Sciences  
University of Dundee  
l.c.mcswiggan@dundee.ac.uk



**Mei Lan Fang**

School of Nursing and Health Sciences  
University of Dundee  
m.l.fang@dundee.ac.uk

## Wider Project Team

**Ms Helen Ryall**  
University of Edinburgh

**Dr Fiona Kumari Campbell**  
University of Dundee

**Professor Mark Dooris**  
University of Central Lancashire

**Mrs Alison James**  
Roseangle Kitchen Café

**Professor Nanette Mutrie**  
University of Edinburgh

**Dr Alison Kirk**  
University of Strathclyde

**Mrs Seona McKenzie**  
University of Strathclyde

**Ms Joely Nicol**  
University of Dundee

**Dr Hannah Hale**  
University of Sterling

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