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Mechanisms for Academic Engagement in Civic Priorities

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With thanks to

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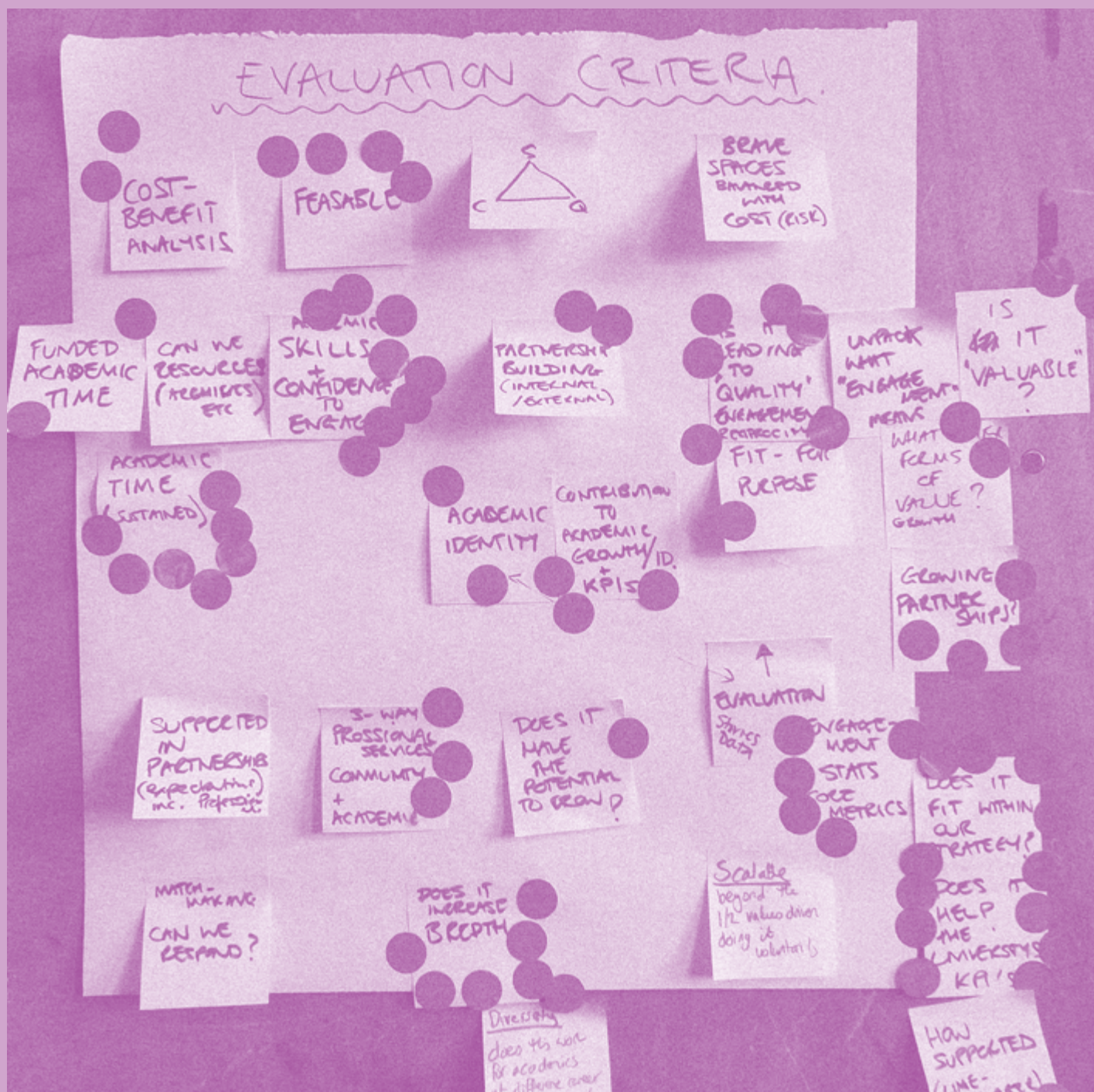
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1

Background

Resourcing civic work within universities was identified as a major challenge across multiple partnerships through the NCIA action learning programme. We wanted to test a model to support early career academics build expertise and sustain involvement in civic work.

Alongside our own experimentation, we wanted to learn from the wider civic, public and community engagement network within higher education; to find out how they support academics to engage with civic priorities and think about how we could evaluate the different models we were sharing.



2

What we did

We ran a workshop to develop peer-learning around models for academic engagement with civic priorities, resulting in a practical tool to help those leading civic, public and community engagement projects to apply this learning within their institutions.

We wanted to test a model to support early career academics build expertise and sustain involvement in civic work. This required the group to push against their instinct to discuss and assess the value of civic, public and community engagement projects in general, and instead to focus on how different approaches might motivate or support academics to participate in civic, public and community engagement work.

Bringing this knowledge together allowed the ‘in situ’ development of an evaluation tool that could be used in the planning stages of a civic, public and community engagement project to explore whether the project supports academic mobility, and share ideas about how this might be strengthened. It is important to note that the tool was developed with one group and therefore represents a nuanced perspective on this topic. Using the tool requires adaptation to the specific institutional context, where the tool might be used to begin a conversation with academics about their experiences of participating in civic, public and community engagement projects.

The workshop convened 12 participants leading civic, public and community engagement from 11 UK universities at Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London.

Over four hours the group took part in three collaborative activities designed to define and test evaluation criteria for academic engagement projects.

The workshop involved three connected activities:

1. Define mechanisms for academic engagement

Participants discussed enabling project characteristics to reveal 5 mechanisms for academic engagement in civic priorities from their perspective.

2. Present academic engagement exemplars

Each engagement lead prepared one exemplar based on their own practice to present and discuss at the workshop.

3. Peer-evaluate exemplars

The identified mechanisms populated a 6-part evaluation tool. Each exemplar was then peer-evaluated using the framework in small groups.



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mechanisms for academic mobility

During the group discussion important mechanisms of academic engagement in civic priorities were identified by participants.

To make a workable framework the characteristics identified by participants were clustered by theme. Participants voted for the most important characteristics, which were translated into five overarching mechanisms for achieving academic engagement in civic priorities. Although these are positioned as distinct themes, there is connection and interdependency between them. Applying these themes in reference to a specific institutional context will allow their meaning and distinctiveness to be discussed and negotiated by civic, public and community engagement teams.

While much of the discussion remained on task, there were moments where participants veered from the focus on 'how projects enable academic participation in civic, public and community engagement' and instead spoke of project features they find to be generally important for success. While we have tried to maintain the original intention of the work, there are some areas of cross-over and deviation, where it is difficult to separate factors affecting the general success of the project from how it may enable academics to be involved.

- 1. Institutional Alignment**
- 2. Support for Academics**
- 3. Individual Academic Growth**
- 4. Partnership Breadth & Growth**
- 5. Quality and Value of the Engagement**

The rationale and nuances within each mechanism are briefly described in the following sections, capturing the key points raised by participants during the open discussion.

Institutional Alignment

Questions raised:

- Does it fit with the university's purpose or mission and Civic or Public & Community Engagement strategy?
- Does it help the university deliver on its key performance indicators (KPIs)?
- Is it supported by line managers and senior leadership?

Alignment to institutional mission statements, purpose, and KPIs can provide academics seeking to engage in civic priorities, with a logical justification for their participation. To facilitate this, civic, public and community engagement teams can highlight institutional alignments, so that academics can easily refer to an authoritative rationale in their progress review meetings with line managers.

This responds to a central concern raised during the workshop discussion about the time and resources that an academic needs to participate in civic, public and community engagement. The reasons for an academic not being given this freedom at the level of line management can be nuanced at the local level, (ie. departmental resourcing, priorities, relationships etc.) and therefore it is helpful if participation in civic, public and community engagement is mandated at a senior management level.

Support for Academics

Questions raised:

- Is academic time funded, and sustainable in the longer term?
- Has the academic been supported to build confidence and skills to engage?
- Are university resources sufficient and utilised?

Here, participants reflected on whether academics have the confidence to engage with civic partners and if this could lead to hesitancy. More support to help academics with the development of skills vital for civic, public and community engagement could improve confidence.

In addition, ensuring that there is some form of funding for an individual academic's time, would relieve them from teaching and other commitments. Whether or not this can be sustained in the longer term was seen as a concern, depending on the aims of the engagement and the reliance on their particular expertise.

Institutional assets such as archives, equipment, professional services and venues could be leveraged to support an academic in their engagement activities. Support should be accessible and provided with minimal administrative barriers.

Individual Academic Growth

- Does it help develop the individual's academic identity?
- Does it contribute to the individual academic's objectives and support promotion criteria?
- Does it support diversity, for academics at different career stages, disciplines and life experiences?

Personal motivation was seen as a key factor in whether an academic will commit to engagement activities, and here the role of the civic, public and community engagement opportunity in helping them to progress in their career, or in their personal aspirations was considered vital.

Alignment with the priorities of academics at different stages of their career was discussed, varying by institution and subject area. This is crucially connected to how civic, public and community engagement is positioned within the progress review process, as mentioned in relation to institutional support.

From a cultural perspective, the way that civic, public and community engagement is discussed in various academic forums is also an important consideration if academics are to include civic, public and community engagement in their personal-professional agenda.

Equality, diversity and inclusivity was seen as a key consideration when thinking about how engagement activities support the growth of a wider range of academics.

Partnership Breadth and Growth (internal and external)

- Does it help grow, sustain or deepen the university's strategic external partnerships?
- Does it help develop internal partnerships?
- Does it bring together the academic, professional services and community in an equitable partnership?

The potential for civic, public and community engagement to help institutions grow and deepen their partnerships both in numbers and breadth, to connect different academic disciplines with various civic organisations and communities was seen as a central consideration.

In addition to growing external partnerships, the workshop discussion also centred on how civic, public and community engagement can support the development of partnerships within the institution. Civic, public and community engagement may offer the opportunity for different disciplines to convene around a specific civic priority, offering complimentary points of expertise. In turn this can grow an institution's, and an academic's, capacity and capabilities.

A triadic relationship was discussed, importantly bringing in the role of professional services to offer vital support and expertise to the academic and the civic partner. Crucially, these relationships must also be equitable to all parties.

Quality and Value of the Approach

- Is it feasible?
- Can core metrics / engagement statistics / stories data be achieved for evaluation?
- Does it balance costs and benefits?
- Does it have the potential to grow and scale (beyond voluntary)?
- Does it lead to 'quality' engagement and outcomes for all partners – reciprocity?
- Is it 'fit-for-purpose' considering there are many different forms of engagement?

Of all the themes discussed by participants, this is perhaps most revealing of how difficult it is for civic, public and community engagement teams to separate the overall 'quality and value' of an initiative from the features that enable academics to participate. When using the framework, it could be advisable to start with this mechanism to determine how the team want to define quality and value in their context, so that it might be used as a reference point and allow space for the other features that support academic participation. Beginning a dialogue around each of these questions, and their meaning for each partner, is therefore recommended from the earliest point in the project conception.

The Sixth Mechanism

The sixth mechanism of the framework was reserved for some reflexivity, a 'wild card', so that a mechanism could be added, for example if it is seen as particularly important to the project under review. This will depend on the context of each institution.

Within the workshop the groups identified the following factors for the sixth mechanism:

- Total Worth
- Longevity and Impact Potential
- Student Involvement
- Institutional Readiness
- Contextual alignment

4

How to peer-evaluate a project for academic engagement in 1 hour

This simple evaluation framework can be used to quickly (within 1 hour) review whether a project plan has the mechanisms in place to support academic engagement in civic priorities.

The evaluation framework was developed rapidly, albeit by experienced practitioners, and therefore should be considered as a prototype that is primarily valid for the original group. However, we believe it could be valuable for other civic, public and community engagement practitioners who find academic participation challenging within their institution, to use the framework to model strengths and weaknesses during planning.

The framework is not intended for summative evaluation, but to provide a 'temperature-check' for proposed projects and approaches, to guide and improve academic engagement strategy and team alignment.

Examples of how each group scored their projects are given in the Appendix.

To use the framework, we suggest the following process:

1. Convene a group of 4-5 peers with a range of experiences and perspectives relevant to the activity under review.
2. Prepare a one-page overview of the proposal to aid quick reference and discussion.
3. Print out the evaluation framework (if meeting in person)
4. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal against the 5 mechanisms
5. Consider if there is a 'sixth' mechanism missing that is important for the context of the proposal
6. Add detail to the mechanisms: 'what does high quality mean in this context?' etc.
7. Shade the number of rings to reflect the chosen score – the centre of the circle is 0 (weak) and the outer ring is 10 (strong).
8. Consider how the scores might be improved with changes to the proposal
9. Where the scores are low also consider 'does it matter?'

Academic Engagement with Civic Priorities

Evaluation Framework

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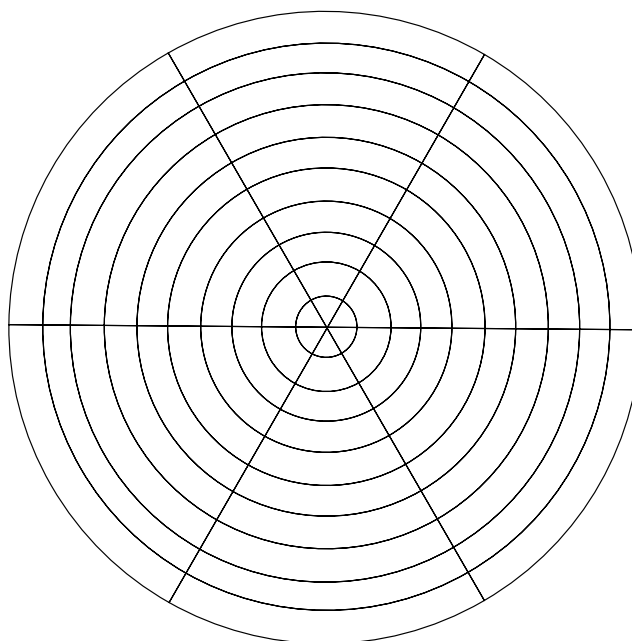
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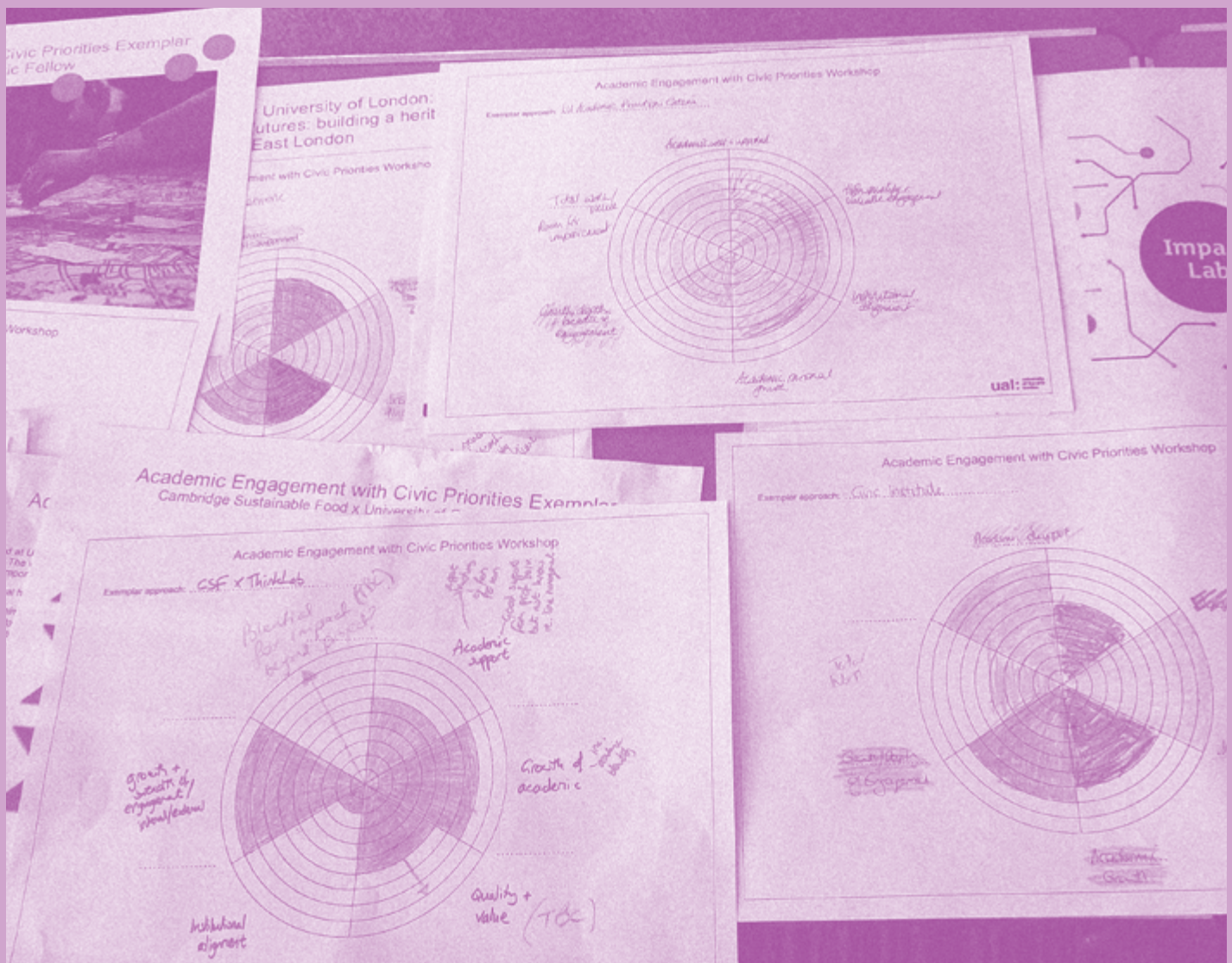
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5 Appendix: Case studies

Our partner universities have generously shared the academic engagement exemplars they prepared for the workshop.

These represent case studies that may provide inspiration for other civic, public and community engagement leads, or non-academic organisations who seek to partner with universities. Here we also include the peer-evaluation completed within 1 hour by participants during the workshop, using the evaluation framework they created together.

The exemplars include:

- Collaboration Cafe – Edge Hill University
- Engagement Academy – Imperial College London
- The London Met Lab – London Metropolitan University
- The Imaginarium – University of Cambridge
- The Soho Poly – University of Westminster
- Nottingham Expert Advisory Panel – Nottingham Trent University
- Camberwell Civic Fellow – University of the Arts London
- Embedded Engagement in Probation and Promotion – University of Bath
- ImpactLab Social Sciences Clinic – Teeside University
- Cambridge Sustainable Food x ThinkLab – Cambridge University

Collaboration Cafe – Edge Hill University

Academic Engagement with Civic Priorities Exemplar Collaboration Café series



The Collaboration Café series has been designed to bring together academics, practitioners and VCFSE organisations for knowledge exchange and networking. It is run through Edge Hill University's Centre for Social Responsibility, a cross-faculty research and knowledge exchange initiative.

The Cafés are themed around ideas that have been suggested by Centre members and contacts. To date, these have included: children and young people's mental health; food security; and asset-based community development. Forthcoming sessions include working with refugees and asylum seekers, and religion and community.

The format includes four or five short presentations or provocations from a range of speakers which sparks plenty of discussion. A summary of this discussion is provided via email after the event.

The Cafés have proved a good way of sharing knowledge and ideas and building connections. We have held them at the university which has given people the opportunity to visit our campus, often for the first time. We are also planning to hold some in community venues in the future.

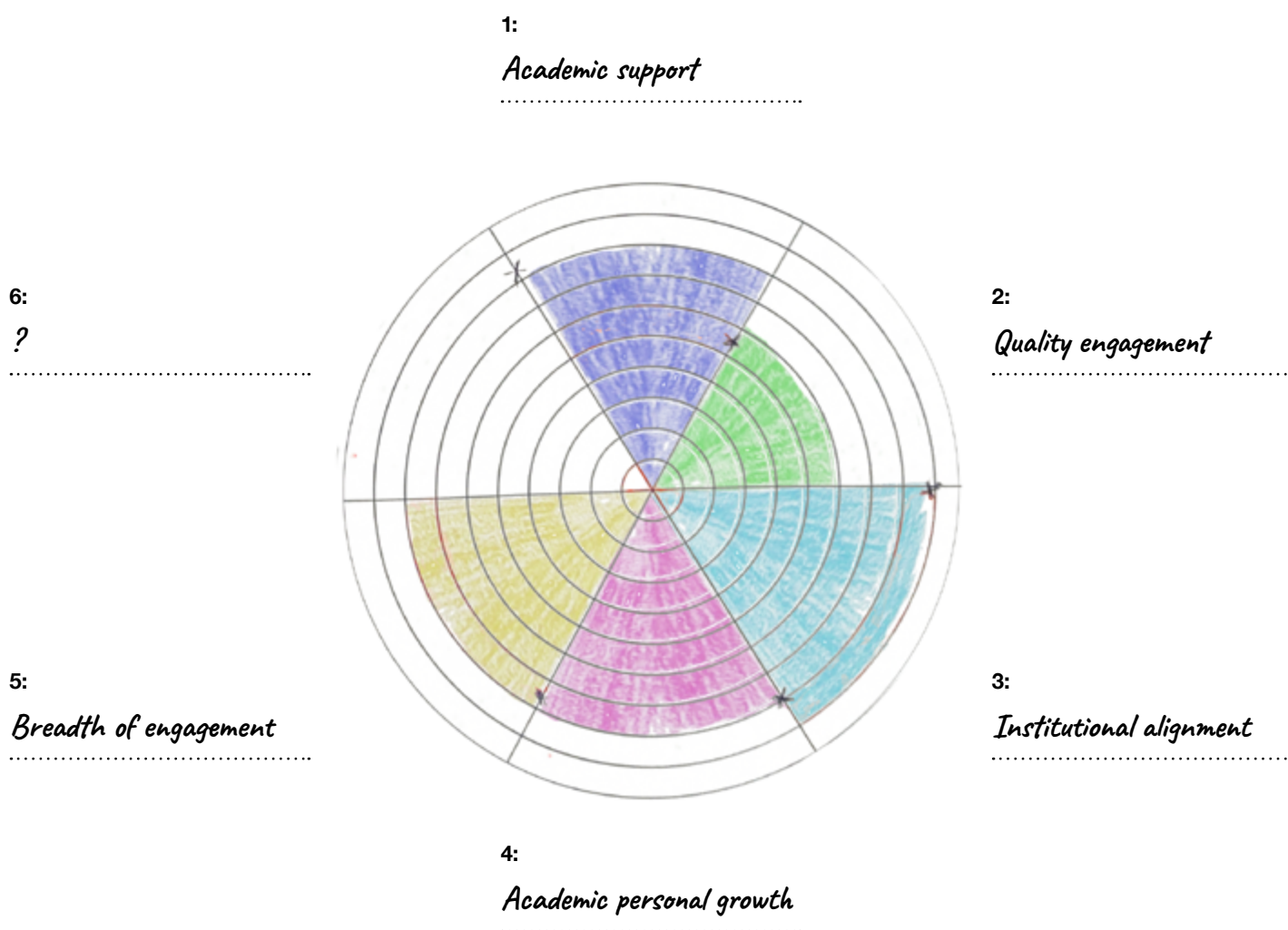
The Cafés are low cost to run. We provide teas and coffees, and attendees are invited to bring a packed lunch when they are scheduled at lunchtimes. To date, attendance has been very good and we have filled the rooms we have booked. Feedback has been very positive.

The challenge with the Cafés is capturing impact weeks or months after the events: connections made, ideas sparked and changes to practice. Increased admin support would help with this, but this is tricky in the current financial climate.

Collaboration Cafe – Edge Hill University

Academic Engagement with Civic Priorities

Exemplar Collaboration Café series



Engagement Academy – Imperial College London

Engagement Academy



The Engagement Academy first took place in 2017 and has run (roughly) annually ever since. It takes place over 7 months (delivered one day per month) and aims to develop engagement practice (amongst Imperial academics and other staff) by experimenting with ideas and encouraging participants to reflect on their experiences. It enables participants to build their confidence, leadership skills and professional identity, amongst a supportive cohort of colleagues. The course is comprised of panel discussions, workshops, activities and seminars, with buddy groups and a (light touch) mentoring scheme, as well as short tasks to complete between each day.

The Academy takes place once a year, from October to April. It is run onsite at our South Kensington and White City campuses, with one morning offsite at the National Army Museum.

It is run in collaboration between Imperial's Public and Community Engagement team and our Science Communication Unit. It involves guest speakers from

across the university, plus an external poet. The academy is attended by/open to all university staff, both academic and from professional services. Each year, we train 12 – 18 individuals.

The programme is internally funded and costs approx. £4500 to run. The main expenses are catering and a year's membership to the Institute of Leadership for each participant.

Our initial training offer for staff consisted of masterclasses, but these alone were not enough to support staff to really embed engagement in their practice and to encourage them to become strong advocates for this way of working. We wanted to be able to support staff throughout the process of engagement and for it to become a key part of their identity – part of their work and development/career progression. The Academy provided a more in-depth learning experience, borrowing successful concepts from the Science Communication MSc e.g. learning as a cohort and working with different people.

The Academy has addressed the issues of time – offering participants protected time to focus on their engagement. However, this also continues to be a challenge, with staff struggling with heavy workloads. Manager support and permission is therefore important in recognising the commitment and support required to complete the Academy.

Engagement Academy – Imperial College London

Engagement Academy



Past participants have gone on to create and deliver activities as part of Imperial's programme of public and community engagement events including exhibits at the Great Exhibition Road Festival, activities and games at Imperial Lates, and family workshops in White City. Some have become members of our internal Societal Engagement Champions Network (acting as engagement leaders within their departments), while others have successfully applied for internal and external funding to develop their own engagement initiatives. One of our earlier participants also recently received the university's Leadership Award for Excellence in Societal Engagement.

Most participants report that the connections they form (with other colleagues and members of our societal engagement teams) are one of the main takeaways from the Academy. They also report developing practical engagement skills through the Academy, particularly in planning, delivering and

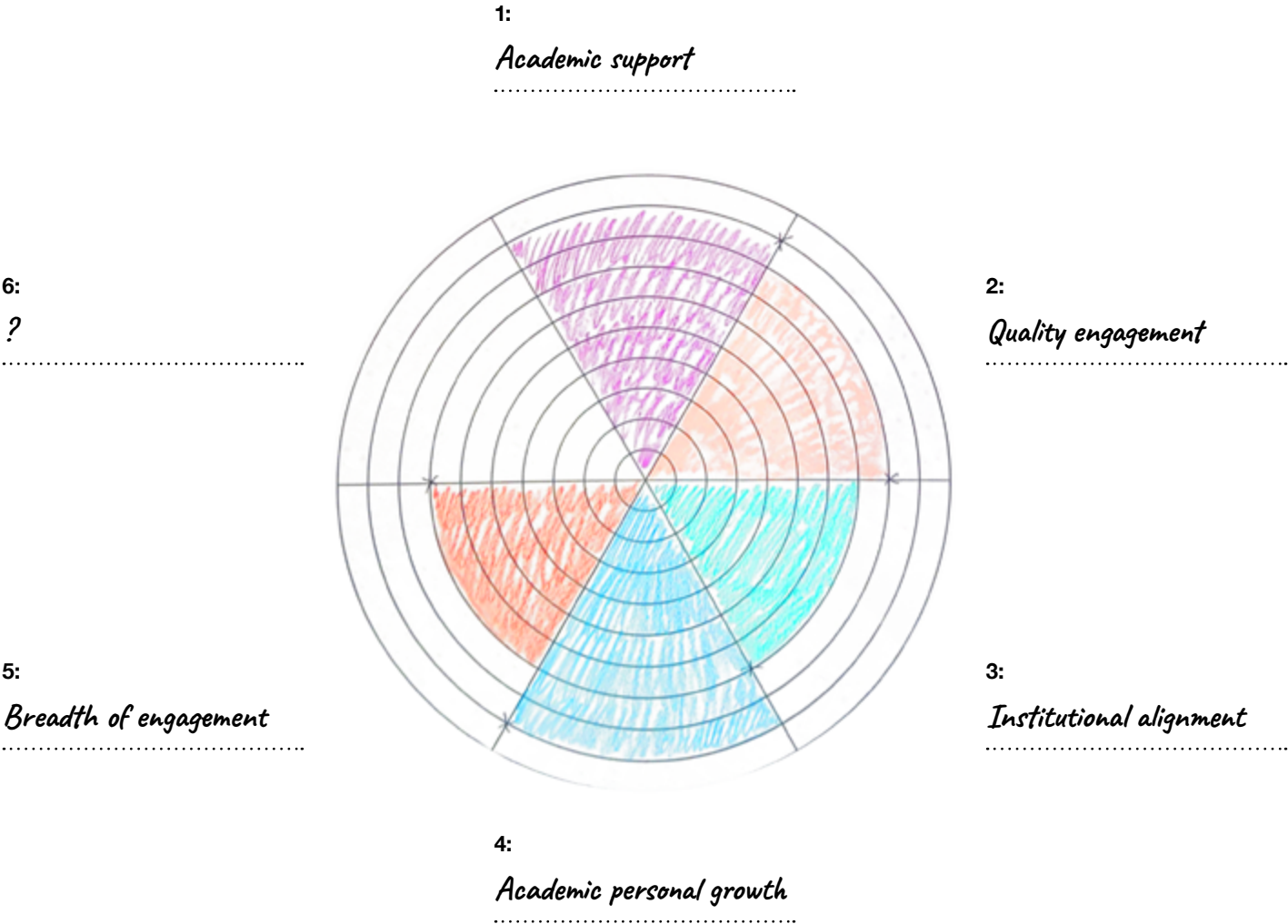
tailoring engagement activities to different audiences, and gaining confidence in developing and delivering engagement. Pre and post evaluation shows that their experience in inclusive and collaborative practice increases throughout the programme, and there is an increase in their ability to reflect on their own perceptions and practice. Some participants reported the Academy got them to reflect more deeply on the role of science and the motivations for engagement, and participants also developed their ability to consider the public's perspectives on their research.

The involvement of the Science Communication Unit has been very important to the success of the programme – bringing academic and practical expertise that we otherwise might have needed to buy-in. They have also acted as an important critical friend. Having the course externally accredited by the Institute of Leadership has also made it appealing to applicants. We also couldn't run the Academy as it is without the wider involvement and support of other engagement and outreach team members.

We continue to evaluate and 'tweak' the academy each year. Recent changes have involved making some sessions more active/practical (feedback suggested they were less relevant, people found the format too lecture based) and also offering more tailored/personal support to some attendees who are struggling to connect to the content.

Engagement Academy – Imperial College London

Engagement Academy



The London Met Lab – London Metropolitan University

Empowering London Challenge Champions



- Academic Challenge Champions were appointed to lead on 6 different civic challenges – Social Wealth, Environment, Health Improvement, Poverty & Deprivation, Discrimination and Crime.
- 2020 onwards
- 30-45 academics a year, minimum of 6 from each faculty.
- We took this approach as no budget or team and wanted to embed as day-to-day practice and make sure plenty of chances for student engagement as well
- It enabled us to work on multiple projects including KE/Research Outreach and more with the local community
- The Outputs and impact have been great so far. Academics keen to engage with the community and a real team feeling. It has led to the creation of a specialised applied research centre for this work.
- Senior Leadership support and academic understanding of the project aims were crucial to the success.
- Important to choose the right academics to begin with as first year were picked by VC and it didn't work as well

The London Met Lab – London Metropolitan University

Empowering London Challenge Champions

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Academic support
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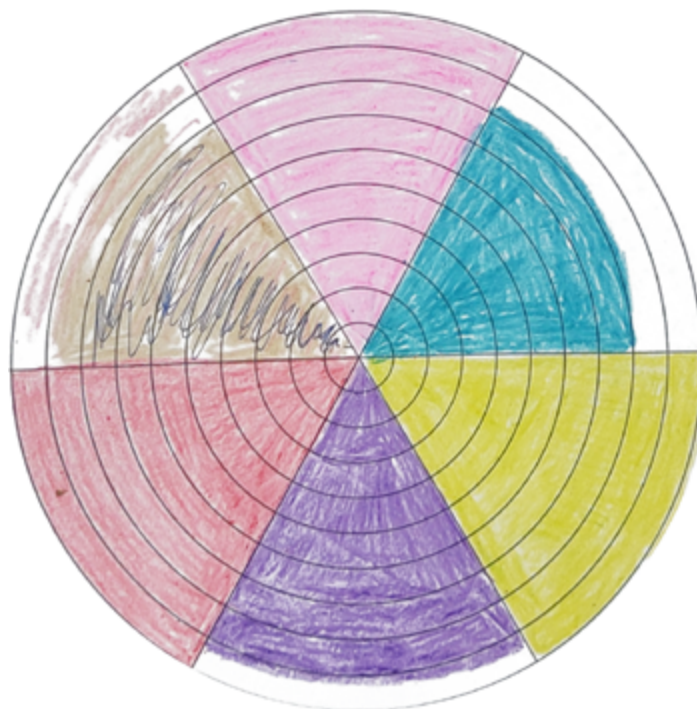
6:
Total worth
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2:
Quality engagement
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5:
Breadth of engagement
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3:
Institutional alignment
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4:
Academic personal growth
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The Imaginarium – University of Cambridge

If you can't imagine the future how can you build it?



Devised by community artist and activist, Hilary Cox Condon, The Imaginarium is an inspiring environment to spark imagination with creative resources for visitors to express their thoughts and ideas alongside experts with both learnt and lived experience. Hilary came to us with the idea and the first Imaginarium took place in 2022 as part of the Cambridge Festival, an annual event run by the Public Engagement Team, University of Cambridge. Imaginariums have been part of subsequent festivals and now also run independently, many with researcher involvement.

Groups involved in the initial development of the project

Hilary Cox Condon, Community Artist and Activist, the charity Cambridge Carbon Footprint (CCF)

University of Cambridge Public Engagement Team and University of Cambridge Researchers

How much did it cost and how was it funded?

Funding to artist and charity for festival involvement + funding to develop the Imaginarium tool kit. Festival and KE funds.

Why was this approach taken?

Community/Civic aspirations to bring together learnt and lived experience from across the city to surface

new ideas of how to work together to make a better future for us all. Use of Cambridge Festival as pilot - high footfall, professional staff with the expertise/ budget to deliver an event of this scale. Use of University convening power and role as intermediary between researchers & community/civic groups.

What challenges or opportunities did it address?

Civic - Climate, Social Justice, Culture. Relational – breaking down 'Town/Gown divide, opening doors, building trust.

What were the outputs / outcomes / impacts?

Spaces where people can have meaningful conversations with those they may not normally speak to.

Action and legacy plans from the start – and amazing how this project has grown - now being used in the development of Neighbourhood Plans, eco-school discussions, businesses + councils consulting on climate and biodiversity strategies etc.

What factors were crucial to the success?

Passionate people with a strong desire to make change. Time, to build relationships and trust and to deliver these events. From the University, a willingness to give away control, money and to take a risk. Financial/logistical/training support for all.

What would you change if you did it again?

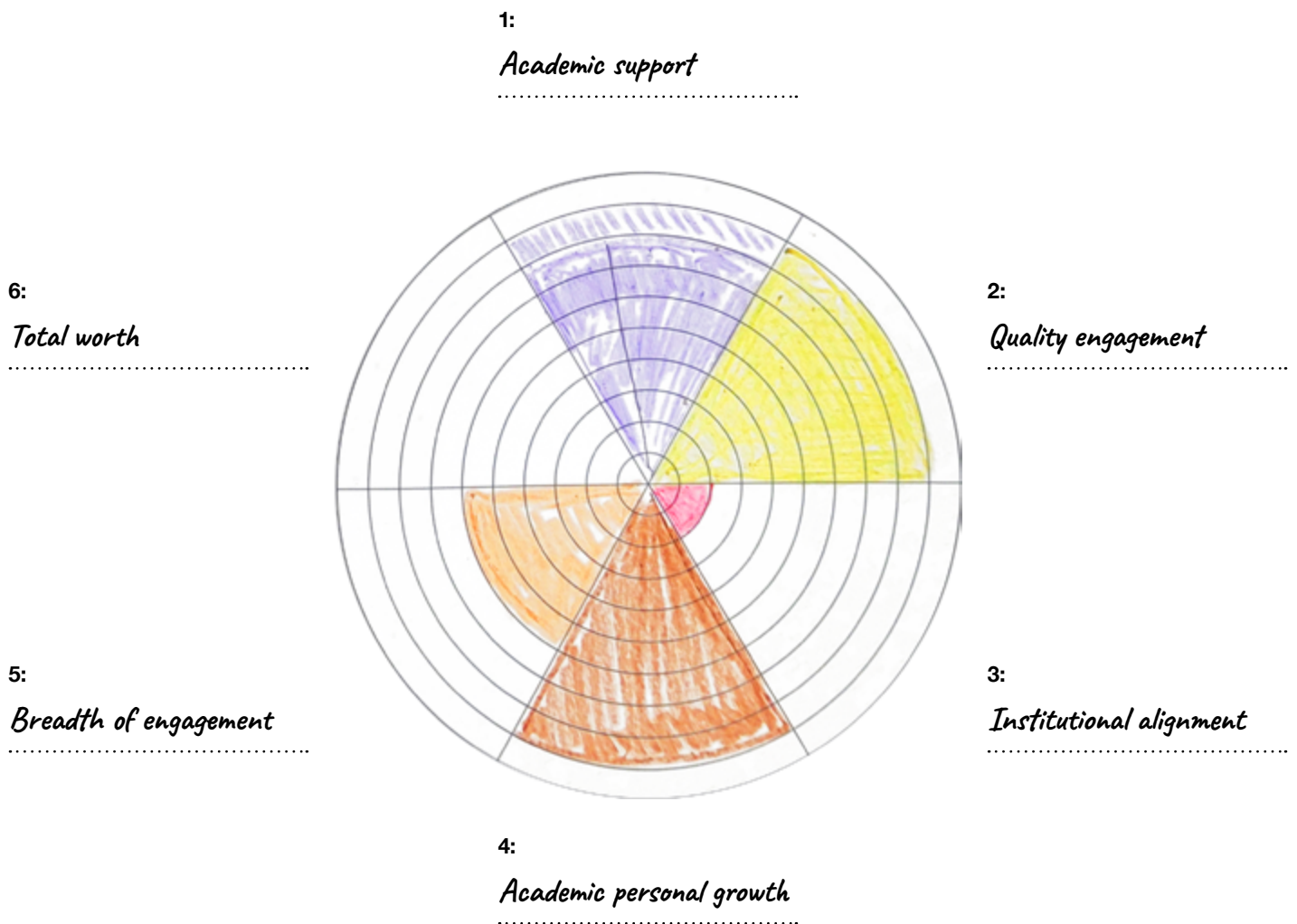
I'm not sure I would change much! But... More time.

Better ways of evaluating the longer-term impact - on research and on researcher ways of working, on community and civic relationships, on social justice/ innovation.

Improved practical tools – payments, ethical process, contracts.

The Imaginarium – University of Cambridge

If you can't imagine the future how can you build it?



The Soho Poly – University of Westminster

Academic Engagement with Civic Priorities Exemplar – Disrupt Your Everyday



Based at University of Westminster's (UoW) Little Titchfield Street campus from 1972-1990, The venue known as SohoPoly was one of London's most important post-war alternative theatre venues.

Its revival has been ongoing since 2012.

- Beginning with capital restoration of the historic basement venue to present day launch of additional street facing Go-to space with lots of cultural programming, outreach and community network building in-between.

- Led by Reader and playwright, Matt Morrison & Professor of Law, Guy Osborn who found it abandoned in disrepair.
- First phase restoration costs of £500,000 were variously fundraised including UoW, Portman, Westminster Council, Shaftesbury Estates. Further phases and programming included support from NLHF.
- Reciprocal Approach: non extractive, honouring funder terms and resisting sector pressure to commercialise.
- Opportunity to widen access to arts and cultural activity and showcase academic and student work.
- Achieving wellbeing impacts for multiple communities, including more vulnerable groups.
- Building narrative and a clear artistic remit have been critical for success
- Fundraising for administrative support from the start would have been helpful e.g. to capture data for statutory return as well as operational support

We ran out of time to evaluate this one... why don't you have a go? Evaluate it using our framework on your own or with a group of colleagues.

Nottingham Expert Advisory Panel – Nottingham Trent University

The Nottingham Expert Advisory Panel



NEAP is a knowledge brokerage function that we set up to support civic and emergency response leaders to answer key strategic questions they are facing.

We have developed a process that starts with our Leaders Forum or Local Resilience Forum. Our team helps shape the question all the way through to crafting a briefing on the discussion. NEAPs try to engage a broad range of academic perspectives to the questions that have been asked.

Sessions occur roughly twice a year, but we can stand up and activate, on, a need arises, we have a series of introductory and question development questions before finalising a suggested day and time. Sessions are hosted at either HEI.

Colleagues from both Nottingham HEIs are engaged and we have also worked with Derby Uni when supporting the new EMCCA Combined Authority.

The work is provided to partners as part of our civic commitment to our place at no cost to them. It falls under the Universities for Nottingham Civic Agreement commitment but there is a time cost for the team to arrange NEAP, the academics who join us and the partners who allocate time to engage.

This approach provides a clear way to share our expertise with partners. It is intended to be a simple way to support them with their challenges.

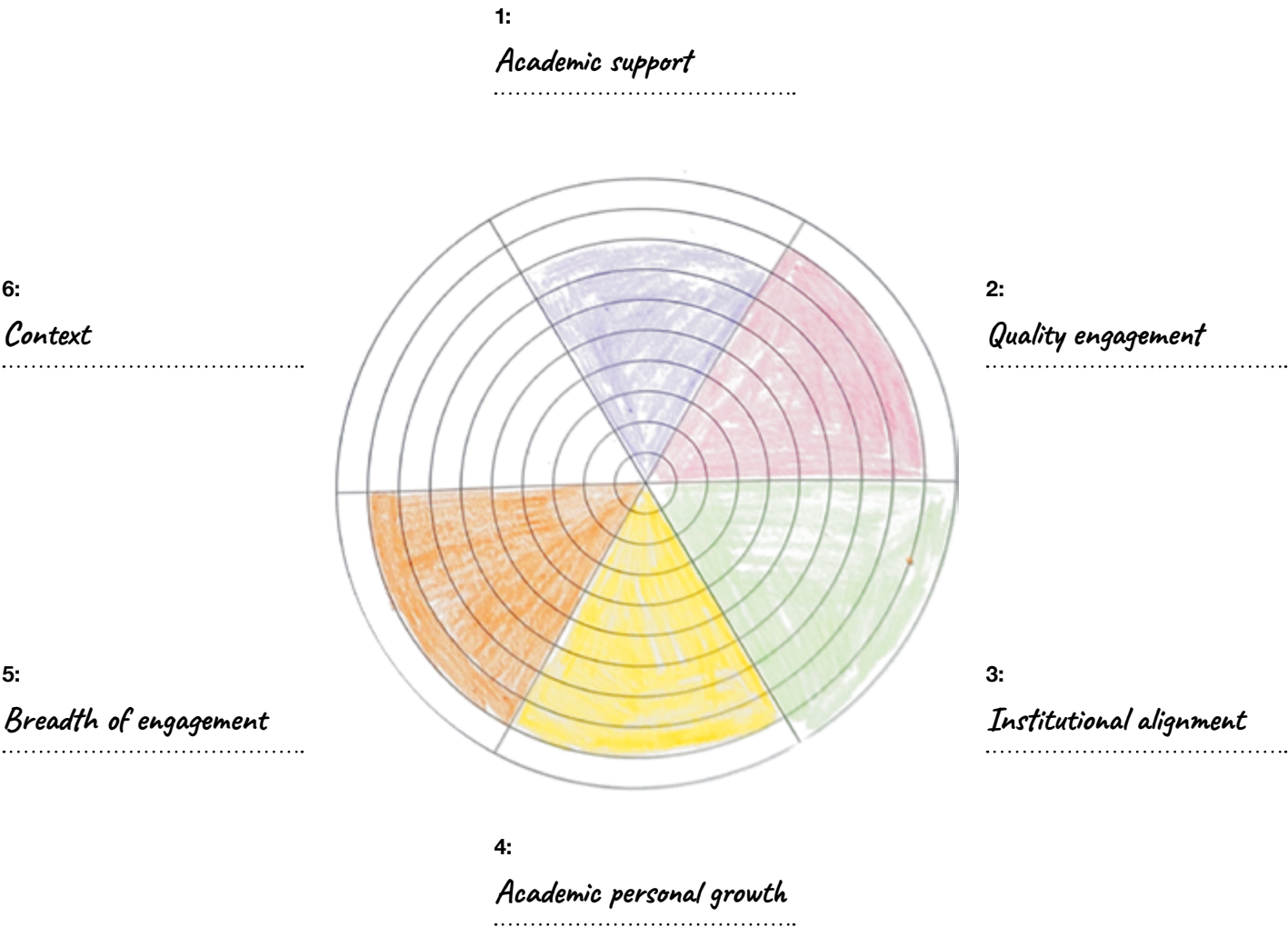
Biggest challenges relate to question specificity, timings and diary management.

We have run a handful of NEAPs, the feedback is always positive. Outputs are for the eyes of partners, but several briefings have been widely circulated.

To be successful we needed to know our academics and our partners needs whilst also understanding how to be the interface between these two groups.

We are still seeking ways to better record the session to help the briefing note creation process and are exploring ways of doing this and we are always on the hunt for that academic who can help us answer key aspects of the questions posed.

The Nottingham Expert Advisory Panel



Camberwell Civic Fellow – University of the Arts London

Academic Engagement with Civic Priorities Exemplar



25 days of paid academic time for a part time or associate lecturer to develop a research or KE proposition linked to local priorities.

Academic has built their networks, locally, and with other academics at UAL and beyond. They will collaborate to develop a proposal which addresses inequalities in health through the lens of insecure housing in South London.

The fellowship was developed by the Public Engagement team with funding from the NCIA's innovation fund and partnerships nurtured by the team. £12,500 has covered academic and external partner time, travel, food and workshop facilitation.

UAL has a high proportion of fractional and hourly paid academic staff. We wanted to provide time and connections for an academic to develop their expertise in relation to local priorities and developing fundable propositions.

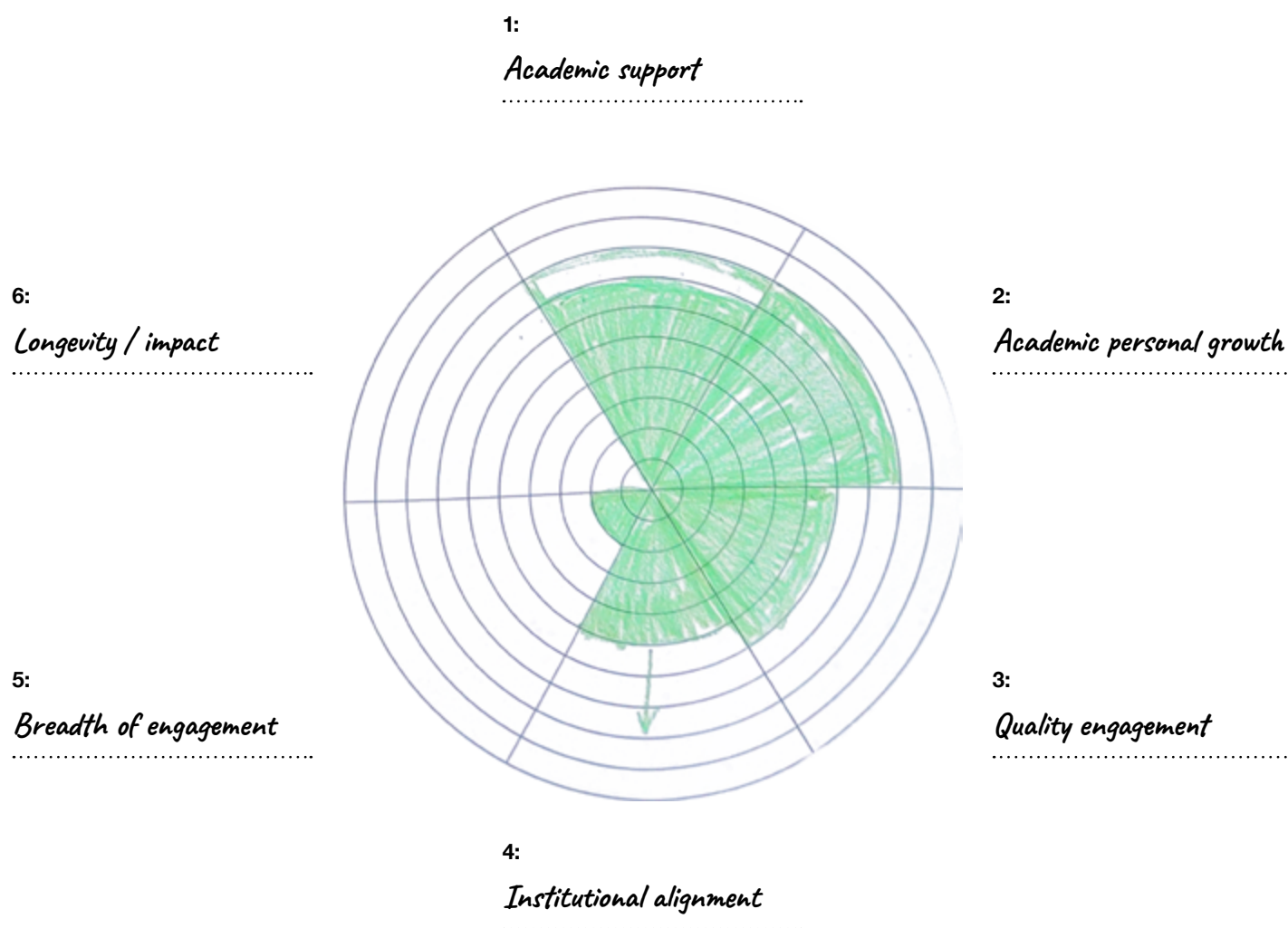
The academic will produce a theory of change, which will be the foundation for future bid development and document the role Camberwell College of Arts can take in addressing health inequalities in South London.

Being involved with Citizens UK gave us insight into crucial local issues. Working with them over the last two years has helped us define and develop the role that the arts can play in campaigning around insecure housing.

This has been a pilot, and is ongoing, so we're yet to see the impact or fully understand the challenges. We expect maintaining momentum once the fellowship is over will be the main challenge, as without the extra hours the academic's time will be focused on teaching.

Camberwell Civic Fellow – University of the Arts London

Academic Engagement with Civic Priorities Exemplar



Embedded Engagement in Probation and Promotion – University of Bath

Embedding engagement in probation and promotion criteria

What happened?

Changed our probation and promotion criteria to include public engagement with research (PER). Noting that civic wasn't on the agenda for the University of Bath at the time this was happening.

Where and when did this take place?

2014

Who was involved?

A steering group who were supporting the work to embed PER (see next point). This group included Pro-Vice Chancellor Research, Director of Human Resources, academics representing the three faculties and school, Head of Research Development Office, Head of Widening Participation, Head of Communications.

How much did it cost and how was it funded?

Free (but was part of a much larger project: Engage360@Bath funded by RCUK)

Why was this approach taken?

It was one of many things we were implementing to embed PER into our research culture. We identified that we needed to reward and recognise PER in the way that other academic endeavours were rewarded and recognised.

What challenges or opportunities did it address?

PER often feels like something additional to do on top of research and teaching. Our approach to PER however is that it relates to, and contributes to, research. Because of this PER was included in the "research" pillar of the promotion criteria – rather than it being an additional pillar.

What were the outputs / outcomes / impacts?

PER is written into promotion & probation criteria, and generic job descriptions. A handful of academics have successfully used the criterion as part of their promotion (noting that it's been 10 years since we implemented this).

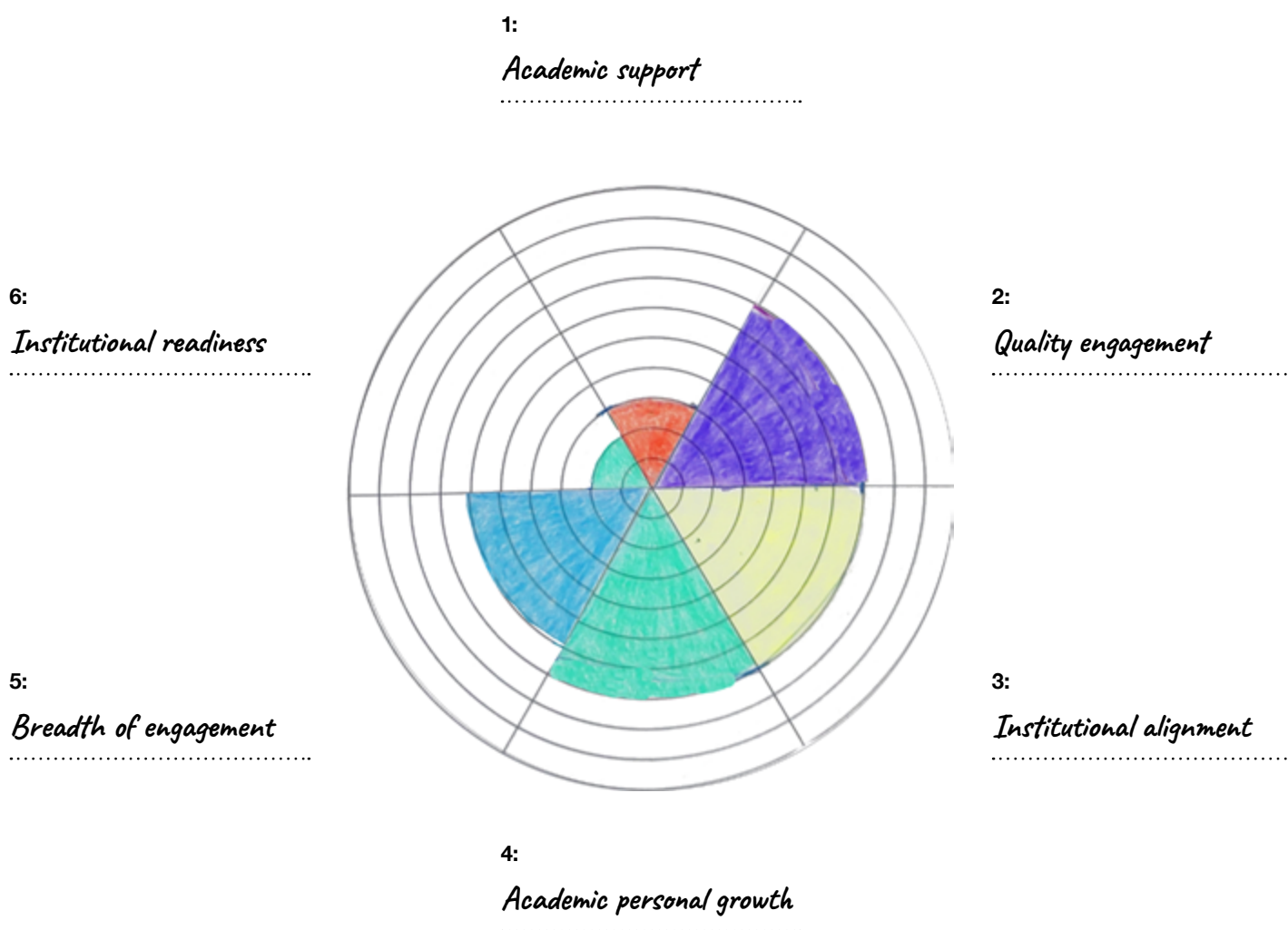
What factors were crucial to the success?

We have not had as many promotions as we would have liked. A key reason for this is because the committee that review promotion applications are less familiar with PER. As a result they don't have any strong proxy indicators they can use to get headline assessments of quality unlike with research (income and papers) and teaching (student feedback and USS scores). We haven't been given access to the committee to give advice and support to the committee to help them understand how to review PER.

What would you change if you did it again?

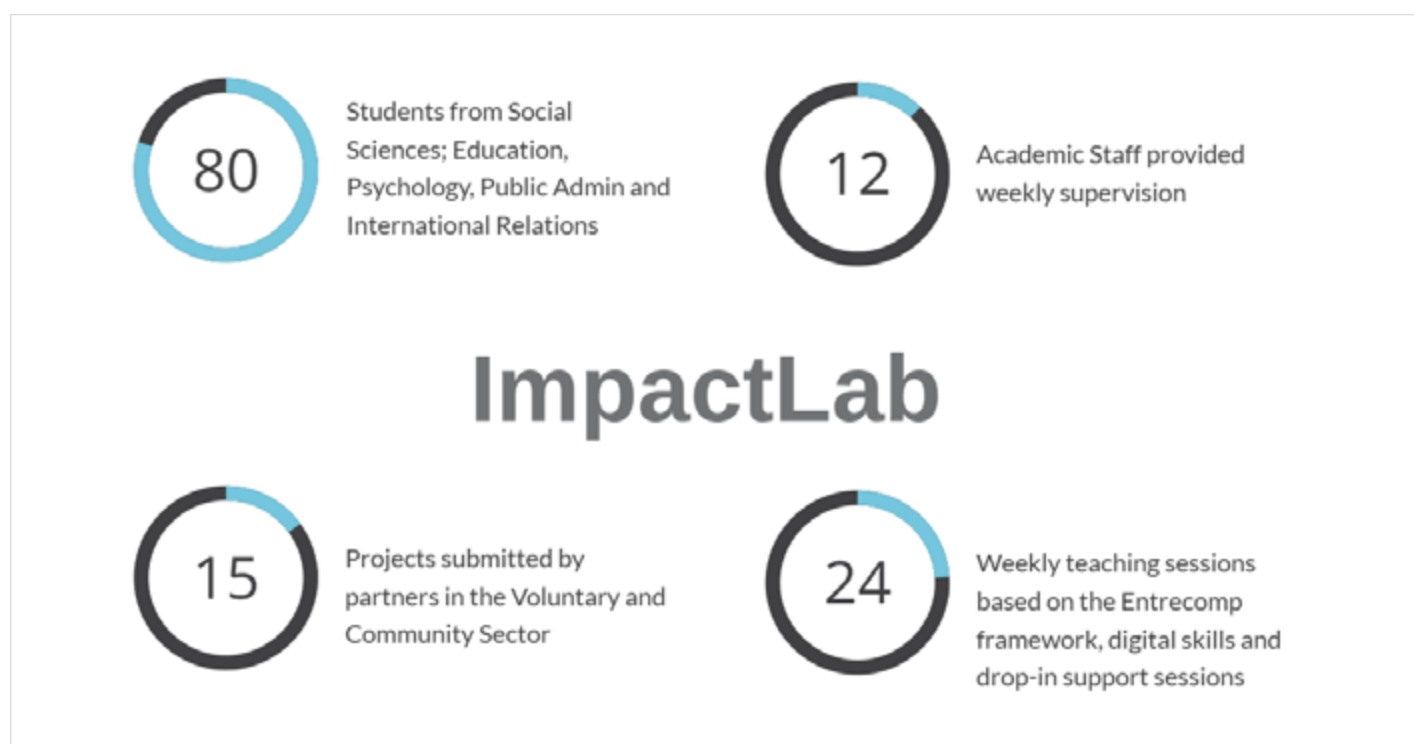
We should have worked with the promotion committee and chair at the time of implementation rather than waiting until it was apparent there was a problem. Given the promotion process is annual this took many years. The chair of the committee at the time was in a stronger position to bring us in, while a more recent chair refused.

Embedding engagement in probation and promotion criteria



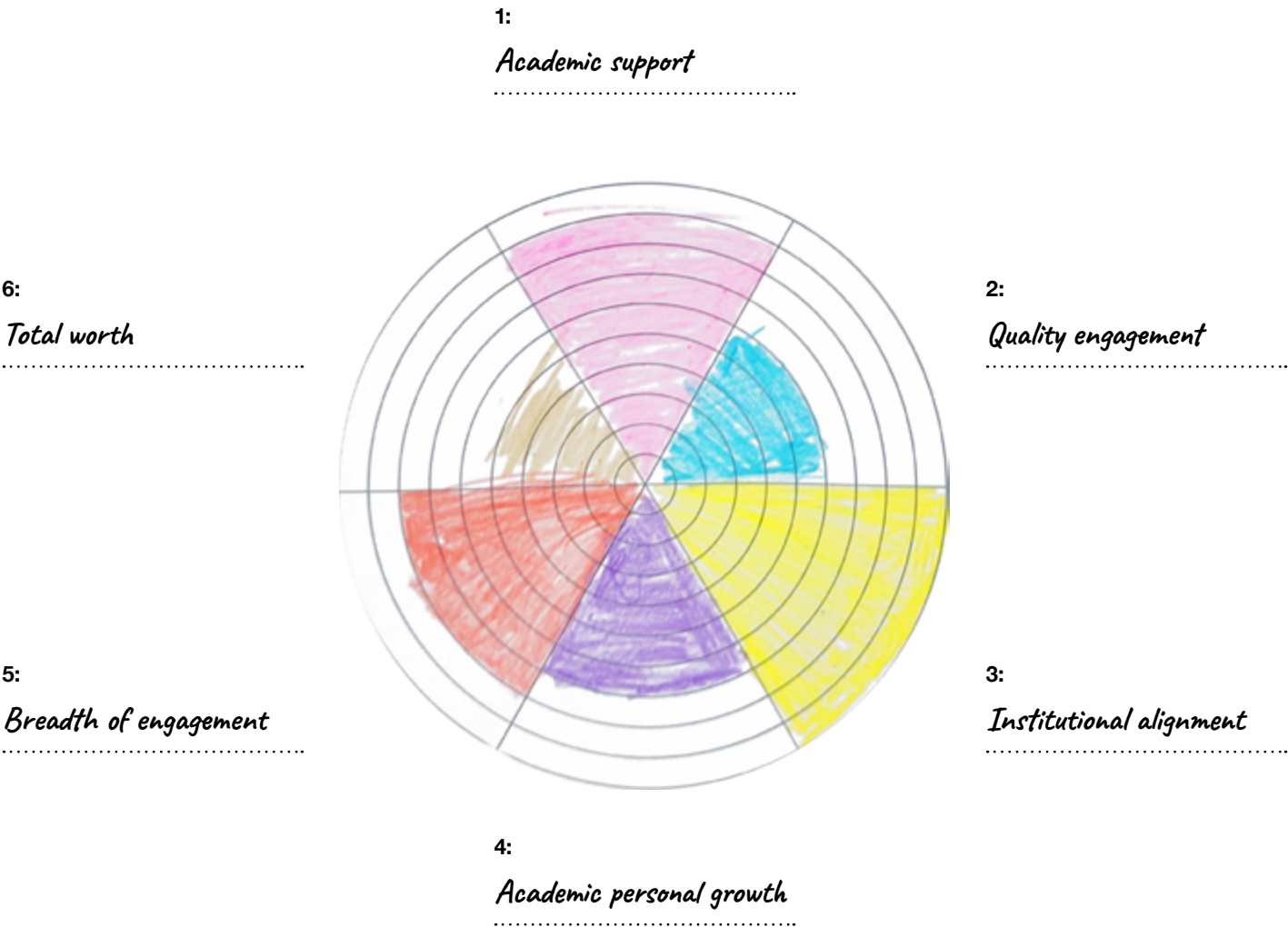
ImpactLab Social Sciences Clinic – Teesside University

ImpactLab Social Sciences Clinic



- Funded by £5k from the National Civic Impact Accelerator
- Strategic orientation of TU around civic engagement, place-based impact. Aligned with aims in Teesside 2027 and Institute for Collective Place Leadership
- Challenges; maintaining student engagement consistently, managing so many moving parts – students, staff, partners
- Staff and student buy in were crucial for success re: supporting the project, and also the availability of staff for drop-in sessions in addition to teaching each week
- Next steps; broaden out to other student groups and wider Departments

ImpactLab Social Sciences Clinic



Cambridge Sustainable Food x ThinkLab – Cambridge University

Academic Engagement with Civic Priorities Exemplar



What happened?

Community/University collaborative research enquiry

Where and when did this take place?

Cambridge, September 2024 – March 2025

Who was involved?

Cambridge Sustainable Food, University of Cambridge ThinkLab researchers drawing on expertise from across the research landscape, and University of Cambridge Community Engagement

How much did it cost and how was it funded?

£7.5K, funded by University of Cambridge Public Engagement dept through Research England Participatory funding

Why was this approach taken?

This pilot project responds to a challenge led by local community organisation Cambridge Sustainable Food. CSF wanted to work with researchers to co-create new knowledge that would help guide future strategic approaches for their organisation and support their work with local communities around food justice

What challenges or opportunities did it address?

Understanding barriers to climate diets and behaviour change locally

What were the outputs / outcomes / impacts?

The project is currently ongoing so the outputs, outcomes and impacts are still to be determined but we are currently working on a piece of co-produced research and will share insights from our project through a local engagement event during the Cambridge Festival 2025

What factors were crucial to the success?

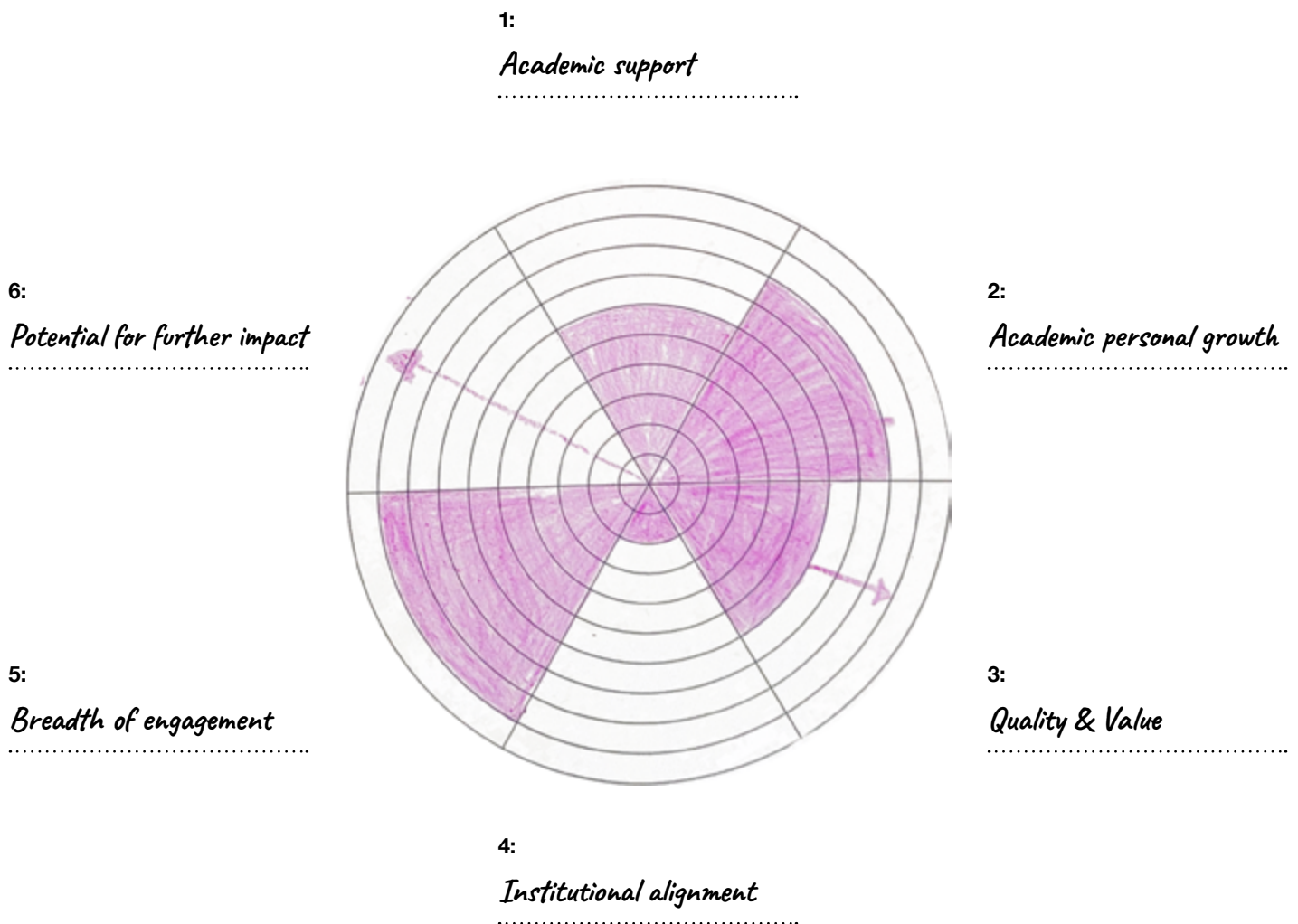
The learning from our project is yet to be fully explored however, reflections on the process so far have revealed that researchers visiting the community spaces and spending time with people in the local food hubs and CSF's distribution centre was pivotal. Flexibility on timescales has also been crucial whilst managing time constraints for both researchers and community collaborators

What would you change if you did it again?

This too is still to be fully explored but early reflections indicate that working in a longer introduction phase for researchers and communities to get to know each other and explore needs and approaches would be beneficial

Cambridge Sustainable Food x ThinkLab – Cambridge University

Academic Engagement with Civic Priorities Exemplar



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