



Co-Creation and Innovation in Professional Development

Report from the
Imperial College London
Graduate School
Roundtable Debate on
26 October 2018

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Introduction

This report is the outcome of our 2018 roundtable debate on ‘Co-creation and innovation in professional development’. It took place on 26 October 2018 at Imperial College London. The roundtable debate brought together representatives from different sectors including the Wellcome Trust, UK Council for Graduate Education, Advance HE, Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Chemistry, Royal Society of Biology, Engineering Council, University of Cambridge, University College London, Brunel University and Imperial College. The full list of contributors is documented at the end.



Figure 1 Professor Tony Bovaird

To set the scene, Professor Tony Bovaird (fig 2), Director of Governance International and Emeritus Professor of Public Management and Policy, University of Birmingham, gave a presentation on ‘Beyond Engagement and Participation: the emerging role of user and community coproduction’. This demonstrated the components of co-production and provided a number of excellent examples from the public policy sector including councils working with the public and a hospital in Sweden that worked with the patients to improve outcomes.

It is important to note here that we are considering co-creation and co-production to mean the involvement of users in the processes such as co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery, and co-assessment. In this report the word ‘users’ is adopted to cover the range of students/citizens/professionals who benefit from our respective services. The discussion focused on the four C’s of co-production and the five steps of implementation shown in figure 2. Finally the emphasis on whether creation or production is used is influenced by the sector involved.



Figure 2 Co-production Star (reproduced with permission from Governance International)

Co-production & Co-creation

There is increasing interest in co-production and co-creation as evidenced by the increasing number of publications and commentaries on this topic (e.g. Radnor et al (2018), Hickey et al (2018)). The university sector has aspects of co-production in their provision, for example where ‘students as partners’ is embedded in their learning and teaching strategies.

Co-production and co-creation are based on collaboration, e.g. doing **with** and not to. The benefit of co-production and co-creation is that they are a sustainable solution to progress. The sharing of knowledge, practice, and responsibility leads to greater sustainability.

Professor Bovaird emphasised that co-production was based on “*professionals and citizens making better use of each other’s assets to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency.*” We debated how to ‘select’ co-producers. Prof Bovaird encouraged a bottom up approach – start with activities rather than just representation. A top down process can lead to a lack of engagement. Co-production is about working with people who **know** and **care**. Hence we should identify users who know (have ideas, suggestions, skills or constructive feedback to contribute) and who care enough to give us these contributions. Prof Bovaird encouraged us to “turn complainers into active volunteers; complainers care – make use of them”. Hence they are likely to be good candidates for co-

production. The group also discussed the benefit of co-recognition as a way of mutually awarding all parties involved in the process of co-production.

There are, of course, potential limitations to co-production, for example, not all users want to co-produce; some people prefer to remain in the role of recipient. There are also cost and time implications to consider, although the potential benefits may well eventually outweigh these. Some might also say that co-production is risky. In response to this, Prof Bovaird challenged us “aren’t current approaches risky?” Risk alone should not stop us from trying new things out. If we have reservations about co-production, we should remember that users know that what we do isn’t perfect. “Loosen up - experiment!” (Professor Bovaird). By involving users in the design and review phase, they will be more likely to engage and understand why we want to experiment with and develop our practice. Social media can also be a useful means of getting feedback from users, we should not assume that social media only has frivolous purposes.

Co-commissioning

Here users have a stake in deciding what is needed and what should be prioritised. This is the starting point and is often overlooked; often the agenda is set, and users are then asked to get involved. The group discussed taking a step back so that users are also involved in setting the agenda.

UCL: Researchers are invited to bid for their own funding for researcher development and professional development. The students are deciding what to prioritise and what the agenda should be.

Co-design

Imperial College: Currently at Imperial our Student Representation training has been co-designed with the student union reps. They have been involved in all four steps of co-production. (Example provided by Dr Caroline Hargreaves)

We discussed that this area needs much more consideration. One issue in co-design is the time it takes and how much time a user can give to the process. This may be more successful in the public policy area compared to other sectors. However, there are positive schemes such as the StudentShapers project at Imperial. Here

‘students are supported to undertake a collaborative partnership with staff involving joint ownership and decision making over both the process and outcome’ (see [StudentShapers](#)).

Co-Delivery

It was noted that only 8% of the population are ‘core’ volunteers, i.e. they account for a high proportion of all volunteering that takes place, although 40% of the population do some volunteering occasionally during each year). There is therefore much work to do in changing the culture so that people are willing/empowered to co-deliver.

Wellcome Trust – developing a focus on citizen science public engagement activities, which rethinks the notion of ‘experts’ and involves people at the heart of the situation/problem rather than just those with the ‘right qualifications’ – people-centric rather than science-centric mind-set.

However, this area of co-production seems to be currently where our strength lies in the university sector. At Imperial, for example, we have several initiatives where our students co-deliver courses. We could all expand this further.

Co-assessment

Engineering Council – when engaging in any kind of co-production, it is important to bear in mind that it is not just about adding to current offerings. We need to keep provision agile and know what provision we should stop offering.

We can engage in co-assessment by involving students in the review of outcomes. This is partly realised through user evaluations, but also involving users in deciding how we gather feedback from them (surveys or reviews jointly led by the user).

Executive Summary

The roundtable identified a number of key points:

- Learning from another sector, public policy and management, was hugely beneficial. Especially identifying the four clear steps of co-production as co-commissioning, co-delivery, co-design, and co-assessment was helpful for those involved in professional development.
- Co-production and co-creation is present to some extent in the professional development provision for each sector represented at the roundtable. However, it was a salient moment to recognise that we could do so much more. Those present accepted that we should consider extending our approach to embed all four steps of co-production.
- Extending engagement beyond the already engaged was identified as a key challenge. Recognising complainers as potential co-producers and co-creators was a helpful insight.
- Being prepared to take risks was also acknowledged as a key shift in our way of working.

Impact from Roundtable Debate

The attendees provided feedback on what they would do as action points or take-home messages from attending the debate. Some of these have been captured in the quote boxes in this document and others are listed here:

- University College London: There are some great examples of co-creation working well in our approaches to professional development at UCL; however, the event inspired me to explore a collaborative, co-creation approach to creating new learning experiences for researchers, wherever possible, and apply a 'co-creation' lens to new and existing provision to review and update it as necessary.
- University College London: We will consider where we could do more to 'close the feedback' loop on great initiatives that have been started but might well benefit from further input from participants as co-creators.
- University of Cambridge: In the spirit of co-production, I have, today, been working with some colleagues on a new funding call for researcher-led initiatives. Our plan is to reframe the call so that it is more clearly about asking researchers to identify creative interventions which they think will make a difference in their own community. Professional services teams will collaborate with researchers to shape 'innovation' bids and co-deliver them. After these initial interventions have taken place, innovation bid holders will be able to pitch for follow-on funding to expand the impact of the initiative, e.g. to reach a wider community, and the recipients of the follow-on funding will be selected by a team which includes community reps and professional services staff.

- Brunel University: We are planning to introduce, as a first step of co-production, information about what things we have improved as a result of our collaboration with students. We think students will get a better understanding of updates/process/changes and we will be able to incorporate further co-production in the near future.
- Imperial College Graduate School: we are exploring how to embed the 'Four Co's' concept across our provision and making it an underpinning way in which we work.

References

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- Hickey G., Richards T., and Sheehy J., (2018) Co-production from proposal to paper, three examples show how public participation in research can be extended at every step of the process to generate useful knowledge. *Nature*, Vol 562, 4 October 2018, Comment © 2018 Springer Nature Limited. Available from <https://www.nature.com/magazine-assets/d41586-018-06861-9/d41586-018-06861-9.pdf> [Date Accessed 3/11/2018]
- Radnor, Z., Strokosch, K. and Osborne, S.P., (2018) Co-Production and the Co-Creation of Value in Public Services: A Perspective from Service Management 1. In *Co-Production and Co-Creation*, pp. 18-26, Routledge.

Contributors to the debate, 26 October 2018

Higher Education Institutions

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| • Brunel University | Dr Inma Andres |
| • University of Birmingham | Prof Tony Bovaird |
| • University of Cambridge | Dr Steve Joy |
| • University College London | Dr Rochelle Rowe |

Higher Education Sector

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| • Advance HE | Dr Catherine Hack |
| • UK Council for Graduate Education | Dr Owen Gower |

Charity

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| • Wellcome Trust | Dr Jonathan Best |
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Professional Bodies

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| • Royal Society of Biology | Dr Joanna Needham |
| • Royal Society of Chemistry | Dr Jonelle Harvey |
| • Engineering Council | Ben Jones |
| • Institute of Physics | Shane Nicholas |

Student Representatives

- | | |
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| • Imperial College Graduate Student Union | Ute Thiermann |
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