

This document provides a transcript of a JISC Business and Community Engagement (BCE) video that highlights ongoing BCE work in and around Northumbria University. The video provides views from Prof. Oisín MacNamara (Director of Research, Regional & European Affairs). The video can be found via the JISC BCE YouTube Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/JISCBCE>

video transcript

Voice Over: Oisín MacNamara is Director of Research in Northumbria Universities Research & Knowledge Transfer Unit. For Oisín and many of his peers considering the best approach to the development of customer relations management systems is an essential but complicated task.

Oisín MacNamara: Some universities already have invested in customer relationship management systems. We haven't yet. One of the challenges we have is encouraging academics to share their contacts. They may have developed a link with a particular business for many years. They will treasure that contact, so how you encourage a culture of openness and sharing is very difficult and there is no quick fix to it. It does need some top down push to make sure that everybody buys into this way of working to a certain degree. But it also needs some sensitive security protocols. The technology will allow you to log and map every single telephone conversation, every single email, every single memo. What you don't necessarily want is for all of those to be in, not the public domain, but even your internal university domain. You want certain controls and protocols on how you manage that.

Voice Over: Links with other universities have increased Northumbria Universities knowledge base as has a recent trip to Michigan State University.

Oisín MacNamara: We were just there to listen, certainly what we saw in MSU and some of the other universities was an attempt to make it much more integral to the whole body of the university and the way they do this is to make sure that when you're working with the community that you're also pursuing the same academic targets that you would to prove your excellence. So you want excellent teaching and excellent research so you need high quality publications and all the normal measures of excellence that you'd expect in a University. And just to give you an idea of the scale about 20% of their entire academic activity is genuinely, involves community engagement. So it is, if you like their academic effort as well as being international excellent standard, it's actually making a practical difference to the local communities in that part of the USA. The one advantage they've got that we haven't, at least to any great degree is endowments. They will always try and seek external funding to increase the scale and quality of the work they do but they've just got those endowment reserves to underpin the infrastructure to make sure that they've got a team just to oil the wheels, keep communications going, to evaluate and to try and nurture those long term relationships with all their local stakeholders. That resource does take money. Now within the British system we do have some funding but that's a tiny fraction of the amount of resource that universities have to run on. So if universities are really serious about doing this they've got to make sure that they can if you like, at least mobilised and pool their existing resources of money so that they can do things effectively.

Voice Over: Evaluating knowledge transfer is often very difficult but as Oisín explains it is imperative that knowledge transfer departments are able to demonstrate impact.

Oisín MacNamara: The key word now in Higher Education and in government is impact and it's all very well counting outputs but that just shows you how busy you've been. At the moment the best way of describing and accounting for impact is simply narrative for example, some of the work done on regenerative medicine in terms of the impact on society. That can be very powerful and that's very useful. We need to do more than that and there are various models being developed to try and measure added value, if you like the perception of the value of the work by the user. There's no point in just using the community as guinea pigs going out and doing research. It has to be relevant to them and that's an iterative process. They've got to tell you what they expect, what are their expectations from the collaborative work and then maybe modify some of the work as you go along. So it's that communication and positive feedback. What is important about knowledge transfer is that it makes a difference.