

# Research Leadership for the Community-Engaged University: Key Challenges

Angie Hart and Andrew Church

## Abstract

*In Great Britain, attempts to broaden university-community engagement have taken significant steps in recent years. A wide variety of community-engagement structures and activities are now emerging. This paper uses one innovative example—University of Brighton’s Community-University Partnership Programme—to describe the opportunities and probe the dilemmas. The paper shows how leadership is at the heart of arrangements whereby diverse groups come together with different goals and motives to take part in a collective process. The complex leadership needed to succeed at such efforts is considered. Recommendations for institutional change and growth are made.*

Within the UK, the last three decades have seen a significant change in the relations between local communities and universities and the emergence of a wide variety of community engagement structures and activities (Hart, Maddison, and Wolff 2007; University of Cambridge 2005). These have been driven in part by the widening participation agenda in higher education, which has deepened links between universities and other local education providers aimed at attracting students from lower income backgrounds (see for example DES 2003; NAO 2008). Attempts to broaden university-community engagement beyond the education sphere have taken significant steps forward recently. For example, in 2007 Great Britain’s Higher Education Council funded two multimillion pound initiatives. The first of these is the Beacons for Public Engagement, which is also supported by Research Councils UK (RCUK) and by the Wellcome Trust (see [www.publicengagement.ac.uk/](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/)) and involves six groups of universities and partner organizations such as museums and media companies seeking to build capacity for public engagement with higher education. The second nationally funded initiative is the geographically focused South East Coastal Communities Project (see [www.coastalcommunities.org.uk/](http://www.coastalcommunities.org.uk/)), which supports a program of community research and related work across nine higher education institutions in the South East of England. For the Universities that have Beacon status, community engagement with the public is defined as involving “specialists in higher education listening to, developing their understanding of, and interacting with nonspecialists. The public includes individuals and groups who do not currently have a formal relationship with a higher education institution through teaching, research or knowledge transfer” (HEFCE 2006, 1). Beyond these two funded initiatives, the involvement of universities with communities in their local area has often been driven by some of the consequences of the expansion of higher education. For example, problematic

pressures on local housing markets arising from student accommodation demand have resulted in new community partnership structures (Smith and Holt 2007).

Despite these social issues facing universities and the recent initiatives to foster community-university engagement, many of the current activities involving universities in their local communities continue to focus on developing local economic capacity (Kelly 2006). This is clearly reflected in the structures of UK universities, all of whom have some formal arrangements to support business engagement. Even in those cases where clear cultural or social benefit is the aim of community engagement, university-wide structures to articulate and support such activities are still relatively rare in the UK, although in the United States and in Australian universities they are more common (Lerner and Simon 1998; Maurasse 2001; Sunderland et al. 2004).

Clearly, the nature of interaction and engagement between local communities and universities will be highly variable depending on the local context. As part of this picture, we have seen that community groups and local statutory providers can gain considerable benefits from working with university academics in their vicinity, with research and evaluation advice being particularly sought after (Hart, Maddison, and Wolff 2007). Such relationships are also often highly beneficial to academics, many of whom find grass roots links with local communities helpful in furthering research and teaching agendas.

Whatever the nature of community engagement, this changing situation has implications for leaders throughout a university hierarchy. However, developing productive academic research leadership that satisfies the demands of the current higher education research climate and at the same time promotes community-university engagement is very complex. This paper aims to consider how leaders and leadership have responded to an expansion in community engagement, to identify the challenges for leadership arising from the development of community-engaged scholarship, and to consider how these challenges might be overcome. The paper draws on the experience of one university (University of Brighton UK) to consider the role of leaders and leadership activities over a five-year period in which a Community-University Partnership Programme (Cupp) was established to deliver a major increase in community engagement with financial support from charitable and public sources. The material used in the paper is drawn from the authors' experience as academic staff identified to play a leadership role in community engagement as Academic Director and Associate Director, and also the findings of external evaluations of Cupp at the University of Brighton (Roker 2007). It should be noted that while the authors are leaders in relation to community engagement, neither of them occupy formal managerial leadership positions such as dean or head of department.

The paper, however, aims not only to examine the issues raised by academic leadership in community engagement but also to assess the implications for leadership structures in universities generally. The topic of leadership in society in general, and in higher education in particular, has been subject to extensive academic and practitioner debate

(Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling 2007, 2009). This literature provides conceptual insights that this paper draws on to understand the experience of leadership in community engagement at the University of Brighton. The next section of the paper summarises some of the key issues that emerge from general discussions of leadership as well as from more specific studies of leadership in universities and community engagement. This is followed by a consideration of this research in the context of the development of Cupp at the University of Brighton. The final two sections of the paper consider the challenges of academic leadership for community engagement, examine the implications of this form of activity for academic leadership in higher education, and summarize some of the critical factors that contribute to successful leadership in this sphere of university activity.

## **Community-University Engagement and the Changing Nature of Leadership in Higher Education**

Leadership is at the heart of arrangements such as community-university partnerships in which diverse groups must come together with different goals and motives to take part in a collective process. In such complexity a variety of leaders will need to provide direction concerning both the process of forming partnerships and also the goals that a partnership adopts. The form that leadership could or should take is, of course, open to question. The literature on leadership provides only limited guidance in that it stresses that leadership will always be an individual and a collective process (Goleman 2001; Lipman-Blumen 1996). Leadership in community-university engagement necessarily involves partnership and collaboration, and so will need to be understood as a collective process. Nevertheless, even when community-university engagement involves nonhierarchical partnerships, it will still require individual leadership to shape the nature of the collective process. Such leadership can operate in different ways through a range of structures to lead to either dispersed, participative, servant, or informal leadership (Bolden 2004; Greenleaf 2002). Thus, it is important to understand how individuals, especially those identified as leaders, seek to shape this collective process of community-university engagement. The leadership of community-university engagement, however, will face a number of general challenges common to any leadership activity. As Bolden (2004) points out, any form of leadership will face dilemmas in the Twenty-First Century particularly, justifying the leadership approach, resolving clashes of values, negotiating conflicts of interest between organizations, communities and wider society, and achieving consensus without marginalizing the views of the minority. The nature of leadership and leaders in community-university engagement and the approach to resolving these dilemmas will be shaped by the wider process of higher education leadership, which recent writings argue has changed markedly as collegial structures are replaced by more managerialistic arrangements. Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) in a review of academic leadership in different countries identifies a growing tension between stakeholder leadership based on business ideals that supports public austerity, with a more public managerialist regime that relies increasingly on semi-competitive incentives for research and teaching.

Studies of the detailed nature of leadership within universities, however, reveal an even more complex pattern that may both promote and resist the logic identified by Bleiklie and Kogan (2007). Petrov (2006) notes collegiality and managerialism are not mutually exclusive, and more traditional leadership approaches in higher education are still very much present. Nevertheless, a recent study of leadership in 12 United Kingdom universities (Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling 2009) concluded that while it is often claimed that bottom-up leadership is becoming more common, in reality much leadership continues to be based on a top-down process. If the chief academic leadership continues to be top down, then leaders of community-university engagement must consider the degree to which they challenge existing leadership regimes and structures or simply reinforce it. The leadership in community-university partnerships will need to be understood within the existing distribution of power both within universities and in local communities (Overton and Burkhardt 1999). This paper adapts the distinction of Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling (2009) between bottom-up distributed and top-down devolved leadership in higher education and argues that community university engagement will involve both hierarchical devolved leadership and more network based distributed forms of leadership. The paper explores which of these is most significant during the different phases of community-university engagement.

## **Leadership in Community-University Engagement**

Studies of higher education leadership on community-university engagement have considered the significance of different forms of leadership at different points in the partnership process. In a study of the Australian universities, Hudson and Hudson (2006) concluded that strategic leaders (i.e., the high level managers in a university such as deans or pro-vice chancellors) initially play an important role in setting a positive atmosphere that encourages collaboration and partnership (see also Preedy, Glatter, and Wise 2003), but, the authors argue, successful partnerships can only be maintained in the long-term through some form of distributed leadership (i.e., where leadership evolves from group activity and widens the pool of staff involved in leadership [Gronn 2003]). The sheer variety of potential community-university interactions, according to these authors, requires the distribution of leadership roles, and this must also include universities playing a role to empower community members to be leaders (Hudson and Hudson 2006). Whether any distributed leadership associated with community-university engagement will have any long-term impact on devolved top-down leadership in other spheres of university activity remains to be seen. Also the emphasis in the Australian study on universities providing leadership empowerment for community members perhaps ignores the role members of local communities can play in empowering university staff to fulfill a community-university engagement role. We identify this as a key lesson as, in the UK context at least, experienced voluntary, community and public sector workers have extensive leadership skills in developing and sustaining partnerships.

The study of Australian partnerships (Hudson and Hudson 2006) highlights some of the key leadership roles university staff can contribute to community-university engagement, such as articulating visionary directions, communicating change

processes, motivating potential stakeholders, and promoting collaboration. Similar conclusions were drawn by the Kellogg Foundation from a study of university-community engagement projects in the United States (Overton and Burkhardt 1999). The Kellogg analysis suggests that successful leadership is based on group work and projects “had several leaders who played different, interrelated roles in bringing about the desired change” (Overton and Burkhardt 1999, 221). The Kellogg study concluded with a model by which successful institutional community leadership can be achieved. The model places particular emphasis on the development of effective incentive systems for community and university partners involved in the engagement process. Although Overton and Burkhardt (1999) also argue that these processes involve both leaders and followers, other recent writing on leadership argues that the distinction between leaders and followers is often not as clear cut as traditionally assumed especially in cases of distributed leadership (Northouse, 2003). Indeed, as we show below, academic leaders in community-university engagement often have to be prepared to follow their community partners and also recognize that staff in more junior positions through their community involvement and activism will have experience of leading in community organizations.

Models of leadership in community-university partnerships also point to the importance of understanding the phases of partnerships. Overton and Burckhardt (1999), for example, identify a number of phases. A first phase is working in groups to find a common vision that reflects the multiple viewpoints about the goals of community-university engagement. This phase is followed by an implementation phase that requires leaders to both challenge and respect boundaries based on hierarchies, disciplines, history, language, and policy practice. Later phases will require leaders with a variety of skills: ability to use authority, share power, facilitate engagement and equal participation, value ritual, establish accountability and reward structures, plan for renewal, and be willing to take risks (Overton and Burckhardt 1999). These are wide-ranging roles, and given their extensiveness, some academics and community members may be wary of taking on such leadership roles. Indeed, a study of community-based research in Canada found that many academic researchers were wary of community engagement; those who did become involved were often both cautious and opportunistic (Felt, Rowe, and Curlew 2004, 20). The degree of involvement appears to be influenced by such factors as rank, discipline, research style, career stage, and previous socialization into academic research (Felt, Rowe, and Curlew, 2004).

One issue that the Overton and Burckhardt (1999) study in the United States pays only limited attention to is the degree to which the academic leaders involved in partnerships might be drawn from academic or administrative staff. All universities have staff who are appointed to undertake managerial and administrative functions, and such staff may be well placed to make a significant contribution to community engagement. As is shown here, Cupp at the University of Brighton made the choice to appoint a director from a community and voluntary sector background who then was managed by the leader of an administrative unit for strategic planning. As we will argue, later developing the relations between academic and administrative leaders is a key dimension of leadership for community engagement.

The studies just summarized indicate that a wide range of issues must be taken into consideration when examining how leadership in community-university engagement developed in UK universities. Clearly it is important to understand not only who is involved in leadership both from the university and local communities, but it is also important to understand the range of activities they will have to undertake. It is important to understand the particulars of the different leadership roles individuals might adopt including how they might address some of Bolden's (2004) dilemmas around resolving conflict and developing consensus. Sometimes these roles will be planned, whereas at other times they may represent an opportunistic response to a local situation. The roles adopted will also reflect reward and incentive structures (Murphy 2003; Overton and Burkhardt 1999) whose influence also needs to be understood. And in all ways, these leadership approaches may reflect the specific context. Earlier writing about situational leadership and the ways in which it will call for different behaviors in different situations will need to be considered (Adair 1973). The next section, therefore, summarizes the context of the development of community-university engagement at the University of Brighton before going on to consider the challenges of leadership in this process.

## **Community-University Engagement at the University of Brighton**

Brighton and Hove is a city with a population of 230,000 people located on the south coast of England, set in a surrounding county with a population of 506,000. The University of Brighton with 22,000 students and 2,300 staff is one of two universities located in the city, and community engagement often involves working in partnership with the neighboring University of Sussex. A recent audit estimated that there are between 1,600 and 3,100 community and voluntary organizations in the city of Brighton and Hove, which involved nearly 20,000 volunteers (Taking Account 2008). In addition, there is also a wide range of statutory government agencies.

Previous writings have summarized the marked changes in community-university engagement that have taken place in Brighton and Hove (Hart, Maddison, and Wolff 2007). A key moment in this transition was the establishment in 2003 at the University of Brighton of the Community-University Partnership Programme (Cupp <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/Cupp/>), which has been responsible for developing a major part of the university's community and public engagement activity with the objective of tackling disadvantage and promoting sustainable development through partnership. The university is involved in other forms of community engagement through student volunteering, access to university facilities, public events, socially oriented entrepreneurial activities, and widening participation initiatives, as well as economic engagement through business and knowledge transfer activities. Cupp, however, is distinctive in the way it involves academic leaders and staff in developing a wide range of community engagement activities designed to address community priorities. Cupp was initially funded for three years by the American-based foundation Atlantic Philanthropies. Since 2007 it has been supported by the Higher Education Funding

Council (HEFC) South East Coastal Communities Project, a Community Knowledge Exchange project also funded by HEFCE and core funding from the University of Brighton itself. Cupp has also benefitted from space being made available in the academic School of Applied Social Science at the University, which was not only financially beneficial but also meant Cupp staff were co-located with academics with research interests in community empowerment. Cupp has an annual budget of £550k, and staff include a director of the development team appointed in 2003 and seven administrative staff with varying roles most of whom have been, or are still involved with running community groups. The aims and broad roles of Cupp are summarized in Table 1.

---

**Table 1 — Cupp aims and roles**

**Cupp has three interrelated aims:**

- **Ensure that the University's resources (intellectual and physical) are available to, informed by, and used by its local and subregional communities**
- **Enhance the community's and University's capacity for engagement for mutual benefit**
- **Ensure that Cupp's resources are prioritized toward addressing inequalities with our local communities**

**Cupp achieves this by:**

- **Providing a structured opportunity for consolidating the identification of local community aspirations and needs in respect of the University**
  - **Capturing the activity, enthusiasm, and expertise of University staff and students and community members to address those aspirations and needs**
  - **Working closely with local and regional communities to identify a joint program of work that meets mutual needs and draws on mutual experience and expertise (See [www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/](http://www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/))**
- 

Cupp's main activities include partnership projects and a Helpdesk. The partnership projects are varied but generally involve academic staff and students undertaking research alongside community partners or providing support and advice for community partners. Each year partnership projects typically involve about 40 academics and 60 community partners and often result in published outputs of joint research (e.g., Hart and Aumann 2009; International Association of Public Participation 2008; CVSF 2008). Many of the community partners work with marginalized communities including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, refugees, the homeless, mental health service users, drug users, unemployed young people, and the elderly (Hart, Maddison, and Wolff 2007).

The Cupp Helpdesk acts as a 'gateway' between the University of Brighton and local community and voluntary organizations, with a reach across the southeast England coastal area. The Cupp Helpdesk guides community organization requests for advice to the expertise of 30 plus senior members of academic staff who have agreed to be Helpdesk researchers in return for small incentives that are used to 'buy' their time (see <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/helpdesk>).

The importance of Cupp and community engagement to the University of Brighton is reflected clearly in the University's Corporate Plan, published in 2007, which articulates 'engagement' as one of the university's five values — "engagement with the cultural, social and economic life of our localities, region and nation; with international imperatives; and with the practical, intellectual and ethical issues of our partner organisations" (University of Brighton 2007). One of the six aims in the Corporate Plan is that the university will "become recognized as a leading UK university for the quality and range of its work in economic and social engagement and productive partnerships." Cupp is a key component in realizing this aspect of the corporate plan.

**Management, Leadership, and Leaders of Cupp at the University of Brighton**  
The literature on partnership leadership points to the importance of understanding the structural features of leadership arrangements in place in particular contexts. At the University of Brighton, the CUPP staff have been charged with playing a key leadership role; these staff report directly to the University's Head of Strategic Planning who also oversees staff responsible for widening participation initiatives. The Cupp staff are only part of the leadership, however. The strategic direction and implementation activities of Cupp have been developed through a complex combination of networked distributed leadership and devolved hierarchical leadership, which have been key to Cupp's continuity beyond the first three years of philanthropic funding. The remainder of this section examines how these structures came into being.

The initial establishment of Cupp involved leadership by the senior university management, particularly the pro-vice chancellor of academic affairs with the intent to quickly establish structures to implement a new initiative and to oversee the use of philanthropic funds. In addition, the leadership infrastructure for Cupp from its very inception included the appointment of a Project Manager (now called Cupp Director) to manage the development team and an Academic Director to support the Director and to encourage academic involvement. The physical location of the offices of the Cupp development team were not in the university administrative building but were situated in two academic departments within the Faculty of Health. Situating the team with academic departments was a strategic move done to ensure that the development team had maximum opportunity to network and support academics and their community partners. The support to Cupp given by Deans and Heads of Schools played a key role in making this work in practice. Cupp also has a steering group composed of academics and those from the local community, voluntary, and statutory organizations.

Once the appointment of the Cupp Director had taken place, initial actions turned to working with university management to develop an academic leadership framework. It was recognized that senior academic staff would be needed to lead the processes that would integrate community engagement into research, teaching, and administration. Without this leadership, senior management in the university were concerned that community engagement would to some degree be detached from the core activities of the university and would only involve a small group of opportunistic staff rather than

academics in all faculties and schools of the university. A detailed description of the role of the academic director was drawn up by the Head of Strategic Planning. The vision was to use Cupp funds so that an academic leader could be partially “bought out” from their main role within the university and act as a bridge between the academic structures of the university and the Cupp development team. In 2007, an associate academic director (Andrew Church one of the paper’s authors) was also appointed to assist the academic director.

The leadership framework linking the Cupp development team and academic structures also included establishing a senior researchers group of experienced academic staff to take part in Cupp activities. This group included three professors, in addition to the authors of this paper as well as other academic staff; all received added compensation for their involvement and were central to driving forward a range of individual projects funded by Cupp. These academics might be described as “community engagement ready” faculty who were prepared to promote Cupp’s activities.

The process by which Cupp established its leadership framework has many of the features that are characteristic of devolved hierarchical leadership found throughout higher education whenever new initiatives are being established in which leaders are appointed from above. Once the Cupp managerial and academic leaders were in place, however, they were given the latitude to develop activities and roles that led to arrangements that resembled forms of distributed networked leadership that emerges from co-operative activity. The networked interactions between the Cupp staff, the Cupp academic directors, the senior researchers group, community partners, and academic staff working on individual projects meant that other academic staff and certain community partners developed leadership roles in individual projects and in Cupp more generally. The resources of Cupp mean reward structures are available but limited for academic staff. Partnership projects supported by Cupp typically involve between £5,000 and £10,000 of research funding, and academic staff interested in community-engaged research recognize that funding and rewards are limited. In some cases academic staff have found these grants allowed them to gain access and support from community organizations without whose co-operation staff would not be able to fulfill their personal research ambitions. More importantly, some academic staff have over the last six years since Cupp was established worked on a series of Cupp projects with the same community organizations and communities they represent. These staff have developed their own approaches to developing community-university partnership, often based on earlier community activism, and consequently through co-operative activity they now in effect lead the university engagement with those particular communities. Examples would include the academic staff who have been involved in projects with the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender communities or certain groups experiencing mental health problems. On other projects the community members on a steering group have lead the overall direction of a research project as they have the knowledge of the issues being addressed while academic staff have played a more facilitate role ensuring the research delivers the community goals (e.g., CVSF 2008).

The role of the academic directors has also had to adjust in response to the nature of community-university engagement, but the academic directors were given the freedom to establish additional roles stretching beyond those in the original job description. These include acting as role models for other academics within the university regarding community-university engagement, publishing on how community engagement is conceptualized and researched, encouraging other involved staff to act as ambassadors for community engagement, developing initial contacts with community organizations that staff can build upon, demonstrating to community colleagues the worth of engaging with academics, overseeing ethical approval in relation to Cupp projects, and facilitating debate on the language and culture of engagement within the university (Hart, Maddison, and Wolff, 2007; Hart and Wolff 2006; Hart, Northmore, and Gerhardt 2009; Hart et al. 2009). The academic leaders also play a key role in the process of renewing Cupp by writing bids for further funding, including that for the South East Coastal Communities Project. Perhaps most importantly the academic directors have sought to encourage academic staff involved in Cupp to link their activities to their research and teaching interests so as to ensure Cupp work is integrated with their primary academic responsibilities. This has involved a subtle mentoring process to ensure staff have the resources to generate from Cupp activities mainstream research outputs or teaching developments.

In keeping with the examples of community engagement examined by the Kellogg Foundation (Overton and Burckhardt 1999) the managerial and academic leaders of Cupp have played a significant role in facilitating engagement. In addition, however, these leaders have also had to be willing to surrender the leadership role to other individuals and allow staff or community partners to lead specific Cupp activities. As we show in the next section, however, the academic directors' roles as community engagement leaders can conflict with their role as research leaders.

## **Challenges of Academic Leadership in Community-University Engagement**

Cupp-type structures in which there are a bicameral arrangements to ensure academic and administrative staff are involved in the management of community engagement are still relatively rare within universities, and as has been discussed elsewhere (Hart, Maddison, and Wolff 2007), they present challenges to traditional university culture, structures, and processes. Many of these challenges directly link to issues of academic leadership, and without an awareness of the dynamics of leadership, academic leadership in community university partnership structures are likely to falter. This section considers some of the key challenges faced by academic leaders involved in community-university engagement at Brighton. These are presented in the order in which they arose in the development of this partnership structure. The implications of these challenges for more general issues of higher education leadership are also considered.

## **Facilitating and Incentivizing Academic Involvement in Community Engagement**

The goal of Cupp—to open up the knowledge resources of the University—was always conceived of as providing community access to the research skills and experience of academic staff. Given this goal of mutual benefit for the community and university, it was crucial to involve academic staff in a particular way so that they would be willing to adapt their goals and priorities to fit in with those of community organizations (Hart and Aumann 2007).

Incentives were, of course, a key element in facilitating such academic involvement. The academic leaders were able to highlight incentives in the forms of small Cupp partnership project grants for research that addressed priorities identified by community organizations and their members. Importantly, the leaders did not have the power to grant these incentives, which were awarded through a formal criteria-based application process adjudicated by a panel comprised of the Cupp Director, university staff not directly involved in Cupp projects and community partners. As far as possible, the leaders were involved in facilitating a process rather than acting as gate keepers to resources, although academic colleagues often saw the leaders as having power to influence the allocation of funds for projects. Such a perception is likely to exist regardless of the particular allocation procedures used and thus is something the leaders have to continually negotiate.

## **Promoting Community Engagement as Research**

The facilitation of academic staff involvement in community engagement through research, requires a more communicative process and calls for highlighting and defining some Cupp activities as research. Many staff, while personally committed to the goals of Cupp, were initially skeptical that involvement with Cupp could be compatible with the limited time available for personal research and the need to publish academic outputs for the promotion process and the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (see <http://www.rae.ac.uk/>). Cupp supports and funds a wide range of projects, and not all of them are research focused. The Research Assessment Exercise (most recently undertaken for UK Higher Education in 2008) recognized that research could be of direct relevance to the voluntary sector (HEFCE 2008). Some forms of Cupp activity, such as advising community bodies on funding bids or evaluation procedures, would not constitute a form of original investigation that is at the core of the RAE definition of research. In the first three years of the Cupp programme, our leadership role involved working with other academic staff to facilitate a process that enabled Cupp projects to include original investigation and to generate data and ideas that could be used in academic publications (e.g., Browne, Lim, and Brown 2008). This process was made easier by a small number of enthusiastic academic staff who became rapidly involved in Cupp projects and who could see clear research benefits and outputs associated with Cupp projects. By involving these staff as ambassadors in a range of Cupp activities such as seminars, conferences, and research forums, it was possible to communicate to

audiences within the University and local community how community engagement can be a form of research.

There is a tension, however, between this aspiration of shaping Cupp activity as research and that of academics concentrating their efforts on furthering research within their particular subject area. Over six years, Cupp has managed to involve more than 100 academics across the university in projects that are of mutual benefit for them and the specific communities with whom they collaborate. Academic staff, however, seeking to publish and give conference papers based on the research outputs of Cupp activities tend to choose vehicles that further their subject-specific career and networking goals. These, of course, may not be the best outlets for disseminating the community engagement activities of the university. Our role as leaders requires us to disseminate Cupp's work and to help achieve the aim of the University's 2007 Corporate Plan to become recognized for the range and quality of our community-university partnership work (University of Brighton 2007). Supporting and encouraging others to embed their subject-specific expertise in the wider community-university world has been one of the more difficult aspects of our work. One of the ways we have tackled this issue involved producing a co-edited book on Cupp work aimed at the community-university partnership market, with contributions from academics and community partners working together on specific research and development projects (Hart, Maddison, and Wolff 2007). Staff from different disciplines have also been supported in organizing research forums and conferences and a staff member has been funded to have a dedicated responsibility to help academics across the university access the community-university partnership literature.

The experience of Cupp is that a number of staff have been willing to negotiate around their research goals to successfully engage in community-university engagement activities that produce research outputs. They have been less willing to adjust their dissemination strategies and tend, given the environment created by the RAE and promotion structures, to focus on subject-specific opportunities. In this sense, the staff who acted as ambassadors for the Cupp scheme played their role in a distributed leadership approach to dissemination in the university and among local community partners. Their approach to academic dissemination more broadly, however, showed how staff involved in community engagement had to respond to more top-down hierarchical priorities in terms of the outlets used to publish research. Community-university engagement may be able to evolve leadership structures in universities that are different to existing hierarchical devolved structures, but this does not mean it can readily alter highly ingrained ways of doing and disseminating academic research.

## **Working with Academics and Community Partners to Mutual Benefits**

Many of the academic staff involved with Cupp projects had previous experience of engagement with community partners through participatory research methods. The approach of Cupp that seeks to identify community priorities for research and mutual

benefits for both partners was slightly different and is a relatively new endeavor for many academics. It often involved us as leaders playing a role in facilitating and negotiating the early stages of the engagement process with some community partners. This was a process that required care and listening to both community organizations and individual academic priorities, confirming Gosling's (2006) observation of the value of quietness in leadership (not something that comes naturally to many academics, ourselves included). It also involved more interventionist leadership to sometimes resolve misunderstandings between academic staff and community members over the direction projects and research should take. A key factor in the success of Cupp has been the existence of relationship brokers who have been formally involved in project steering groups. These were often the director or other development staff from Cupp, but sometimes the academic directors played this role if we did not have any connection to the project.

A key insight from this process is that the problems of community-university engagement sometimes result from an inadequate appreciation by the university of the wider power relations that structure the activities of many community, voluntary, and public sector organizations. There is a need to recognize that the university will be only one element of the wider organizational network in which community organizations operate. Some academic staff, including ourselves, would admit that involvement in community-university engagement requires us to relearn how to relate to the voluntary, community, and public sector. Many of the academic staff involved in Cupp projects were members of community organizations as part of their nonworking lives and initially thought that the nature of personal involvement would be similar in a community-university partnership. They found, however, that resource expectations and power relations were rather different when acting as a member of staff rather than in a personal capacity. Again this required academic staff to listen to community members and organizations to understand their preconceptions and expectations of university-community engagement. In many situations community members have far greater knowledge and experience of what would be purposeful and effective actions than do academic staff. Thus, the community partners can empower the university to fulfill its community-engagement role. A good example is the dissemination of research emerging from community-university collaboration. In Brighton and Hove community organizations often have a much more sophisticated understanding of the audiences, events, and report structures for effective dissemination (see CVSF 2008; Count Me In Too 2007). This clearly emphasizes the need in the analysis of community engagement to question divisions in leadership writing between leaders and followers (Overton and Burkhardt 1999). Effective leading in community-university engagement will require many moments of following. Indeed, a key characteristic for leaders in community university engagement is a willingness to continually reflect on and adjust to the complex and very changeable power relations between universities, their partners, and the other organizations that shape the context in which community partners operate.

## **Tensions between Community-Engagement Leaders and University Structures**

Bolden (2004) notes that academic leaders are under continual pressure to justify their roles in a changing university environment. As professors within our schools we have obligations outside our Cupp responsibilities, including teaching, administrative duties, and expectations around research leadership in relation to fundraising and publication. These responsibilities do not always dovetail with our Cupp leadership roles—fundraising for Cupp often takes us away from our departmental research income generation activity. The solution to this tension was to ensure that Cupp research and development funds raised on behalf of the university more widely, were partially attributable to our respective academic schools.

As long as the academic director roles continue to buy out an academic from their mainstream role, for the academic director role to succeed, it is likely that those appointed to the role will need to integrate their research interests with the aspirations of Cupp and ensure that the academic School is compensated in some way for the wider role taken by the academic director. Thus, academic leaders involved in community engagement have a key role to play in developing a form of endeavor designed to promote collegiality around a shared mission. However, the opportunities for academic staff to play a leadership role in community engagement is compromised to some degree by the semi-competitive incentives Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) that are typically present within a university's structures and which encourage certain ways of performing that may not be supportive of community engagement. Support from the university senior management is vital here, as is developing procedures that allow schools to claim community-university activity as a valuable contribution to their School.

The role of Cupp academic leaders has become easier to justify since the University of Brighton's (2007) Corporate Plan identified community engagement as a core value. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain arising from the duality of Cupp's structure whereby the university's administration and academic strands share ownership of Cupp. In the leadership literature on community-university engagement there is little discussion of the relationship between the academic and administrative structures of universities. The way in which Cupp has evolved in our institution has seen us working very closely with the administrative side of the university—far more closely than either of the authors has ever done before. Most obvious here is our close relationship with Cupp's director. Technically speaking, as professors, we are senior to the Cupp director within the university. Managerially, and financially, Cupp is organizationally situated within the administrative departments of the university and not within a school or faculty, like all academics.

In reality, there is a great deal of flexibility regarding how each of us carries out our roles, with mutual decision-making a feature of much of what we do. Through regular meetings and informal discussions, the Cupp director has been inextricably involved in the academic leadership. This way of working sees academic leadership as an integral

part of Cupp. It has avoided Cupp being associated with traditional faculty/school organizational structures and being associated with one particular part of the university. This has usually been an advantageous model as it has allowed the toleration of role ambiguity and flexibility around tasks, which, given the variety of potential and actual community partners, we would argue are key to developing community engagement leadership. It involves the academic leaders negotiating the tensions within both hierarchical devolved and distributed networked leadership structures, which are a feature of higher education. It also requires senior university managers to allow academic leaders the flexibility of role they need to respond to the varied forms of community priority that will be expressed in the engagement process.

## **Conclusions and Lessons Learned**

The initial establishment of Cupp involved senior managerial staff in the university taking the lead. Over time the Cupp director, academic directors, and other academic staff involved with Cupp projects have taken on a range of leadership roles in order to promote community-university engagement activities at all levels within the institution. A further sign of the university's commitment to community engagement is the new appointment in 2009 of a Head of Social and Economic Engagement who will seek to develop closer links between community and economic engagement. The creation of this role may also lead to further changes in the structures we as academic leaders have to operate within and may require changes in the relatively flexible and distributed approach we have been able to take. Academic leaders such as ourselves may no longer be able to operate so freely and may have to operate within more hierarchical structures. Much of the leadership discussed in the paper is typical of more general leadership in higher education in that it is being learned on-the-job (Bolden, Petrov, and Gosling 2007). In defense of the process many of the academic staff and leaders involved in Cupp have considerable experience of community engagement that can inform their evolving roles. Also many community partners have leadership experience and can lead the development of community-university partnership structures. Undoubtedly the leadership roles that emerge may have started as hierarchical devolved roles but they have to some degree developed into a network of distributed leadership. Often nonsenior academic staff have developed leadership roles through co-operative working with specific communities. These networks involve administrative as well as academic staff whose role needs to be more fully understood in the development of university community engagement.

Our experiences as individual leaders seeking to shape what is essentially a collective process also reflect many of the tensions and challenges of leadership in higher education. Attempts to promote collective and interdisciplinary working often are challenged by semi-competitive structures within universities (Bleiklie and Kogan 2007) that shape the incentive structure for staff and also require leaders to justify roles that are different to the norm. Nevertheless, relatively modest incentive structures, along with academic staff commitment and facilitating actions by leaders have enabled research linked to community engagement to be valued and to start producing published research outputs in academic journals based on original data and

investigation. New ways of working by academic staff and leaders arising from community engagement have involved flexibility in roles that senior managers have tolerated. These changes, however, have not as yet really altered key components of academic activity relating to the need to publish in subject specific outlets for personal career reasons and to meet the requirements of government approaches to assessing research quality. Consequently, academic staff have, quite understandably, sought to publish research linked to Cupp activities in their disciplinary journals. This means that the outputs of community-engaged research are fragmented and harder to share with other universities. This situation is likely to persist unless community engagement becomes a mainstream activity in higher education.

Nevertheless, the academic staff involved with Cupp have made some significant adjustments to enable their research to also address community priorities and concerns. The willingness to engage over a long period and contribute to not just research but also dissemination and communication activities suggests for some staff that involvement goes beyond the opportunistic and cautious approach found elsewhere (Felt, Rowe, and Curlew 2004). A large body of literature concerned with participatory research indicates that academic engagement with community and public sector organizations is often based on uneven power relations that produce outcomes largely of benefit to universities rather than community partners. Conflicts will arise in some projects with community partners and the approach of Cupp has been to use relationship brokers without an interest in the specific project to attempt to mediate. It is also noticeable that some of the research into leadership and community-university engagement observes that universities see themselves as empowering communities (Hudson et al. 2006). Our example of Cupp at the University of Brighton is only a single case study, but we have become acutely aware that community organizations have the leadership skills and connections to empower universities, especially in terms of understanding, communicating, and disseminating within the complex range of community partners in the surrounding locality.

This clearly suggests leadership in community university engagement cannot be fully understood by looking at the type of person involved (Felt, Rowe, and Curlew 2004), their actions, and the traditional division into followers and leaders (Overton and Burkhardt 1999). Rather we have to appreciate how the role of leader is subject to a complex set of relationships and management structures that are internal and external to the university. Currently at Brighton these structures allow community-engagement academic leaders to operate in a relatively devolved manner and work closely in a networked manner with administrative staff, but this may be subject to future change. Furthermore, the power relations between universities and community partners will be a key influence on the roles and impacts of leaders. Both partners are involved in a range of other networks of power and are subject to a raft of strategic drivers or organization priorities that will contextualize how community-university engagement and leadership develops. It is hard to say at this stage how this process will affect leadership relations and hierarchies in the university in the long term but it is undoubtedly going to be a growing influence in UK higher education. Possibly more importantly many community organizations in Brighton would also argue that the

engagement process has allowed them to exert a far greater influence on university leaders and activity than has been possible in the past.

## References

- Adair, J. 1973. *Action-Centred Leadership*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Bleiklie, I., and Kogan, M. 2007. "Organization and Governance of Universities." *Higher Education Policy* 20: 477–493.
- Bolden, R. July 2004. "What is Leadership?" Leadership South West Research Report, Centre for Leadership Studies, Exeter University.
- Bolden, R., G. Petrov, and J. Gosling. 2007. *Developing Collective Leadership in Higher Education*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.
- Bolden, R., G. Petrov, and J. Gosling. 2009. "Distributed Leadership in Higher Education: Rhetoric and Reality." *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* 37 (2): 257–277.
- Browne, K., J. Lim, and G. Brown. 2008. *Geographies of Sexualities Theory, Practices and Politics*. London: Ashgate.
- CVSF. September 2008. *Taking Account: A Social and Economic Audit of the Third Sector in Brighton and Hove*. Brighton, UK: CVSF.  
[www.cvsectorforum.org.uk/sites/cvsectorforum.org.uk/](http://www.cvsectorforum.org.uk/sites/cvsectorforum.org.uk/).
- Department of Education and Skills. 2003. *Widening Participation in Higher Education*. Runcorn: DES.
- Felt, L. F., P. M. Rowe, and K. Curlew. 2004. "Teaching Academic Dogs and Cats New Tricks: 'Retooling' Senior Academic Researchers for Collaborative Community-based Research." Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference, Sheffield, England.  
[www.envision.ca/pdf/cura/DogsCats.pdf](http://www.envision.ca/pdf/cura/DogsCats.pdf).
- Goleman, D. 2001. *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Harvard Business Press.
- Gosling, J. January 2006. "Quietness as a Virtue of Leadership." *Professional Manager* (37): 8–23.
- Greenleaf, R. K. 2002. *Servant leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. 25th anniversary ed. New York: Paulist Press.
- Gronn, P. 2003. *The New Work of Educational Leaders: Changing Leadership Practice in an Era of School Reform*. London, Paul Chapman Publishing.

- Hart, A., and K. Aumann. 2007. "An ACE Way to Engage in Community-University Partnerships: Making Links through Resilient Therapy." In A. Hart, E. Maddison, and D. Wolff, eds. *Community-University Partnerships in Practice*. Leicester: Niace. 170–182.
- Hart, A., and K. Aumann. 2009. *Helping Children with Complex Needs Bounce Back: Resilient Therapy for Parents and Professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Hart, A., E. Maddison, and D. Wolff, eds. 2007. *Community-University Partnerships in Practice*. Leicester: Niace: 170–182.
- Hart, A., S. Northmore, and C. Gerhardt. 2009. *Auditing, Benchmarking and Evaluating University Public Engagement*. Bristol: National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement. <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe/researchsyntheses.htm>.
- Hart, A., S. Northmore, C. Gerhardt, and C. Rodriguez. 2009. "Developing Access between Universities and Local Community Groups: A University Helpdesk in Action." *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*.
- Hart, A., and D. Wolff. 2006. "Developing Communities of Practice through Community-University Partnerships." *Planning, Practice and Research* 21(1): 121–138.
- HEFCE. 2006. "Beacons for Public Engagement." Invitation to apply for funds. [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06\\_49/06\\_49.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_49/06_49.pdf).
- HEFCE. 2007. "Bridging the Gap between Higher Education and the Public." <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2007/beacons.asp>. Accessed August 19, 2008.
- HEFCE. December 2008. "Research Assessment Exercise: The Outcome." <http://submissions.rae.ac.uk/results/outstore/RAEOOutcomeFull.pdf>.
- Hudson, P., S. Hudson, et al. 2006. "Distributing Leadership for Initiating University-Community Engagement." Proceedings of The Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance, Perth, Australia. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au>.
- Kelly, U., D. McLelland, and I. McNeal. 2006. *Universities UK: The Economic Impact of UK Higher Education Institutions — A Report for Universities UK*. London: UUK and University of Strathclyde.
- Lerner, R. M., and L. A. K. Simon. 1998. *University-Community Collaboration for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Garland.
- Lipman-Blumen, J. 1996. *The Connective Edge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Maurasse, D. J. 2001. *Beyond the Campus: How Colleges and Universities Form Partnerships with their Communities*. London and New York: Routledge.

Murphy, C. 2003. "The Rewards of Academic Leadership." *New Directions for Higher Education* 124 (Winter 2003): 87–93.

National Audit Office. 2008. *Widening Participation in Higher Education: Report by the Comptroller & Audit General*. London: The Stationary Office.

Northouse, P. G. 2003. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage.

Overton, B. J., and J. C. Burkhardt. 1999. "Drucker could be Right, But . . . New Leadership Models for Institutional-Community Partnerships." *Applied Developmental Science* 3 (4): 217–227.

Petrov, G. 2006. "Leadership in Higher Education." In R. Bolden, ed. *Leadership Development in Context: Leadership South West Research Report, Report 3*. Centre for Leadership Studies, Exeter University: 36–39.

Preedy, M., R. Glatter, and C. Wise, eds. 2003. *Strategic Leadership and Educational Improvement*. London: Paul Chapman.

Roker, D. 2007. "Making Community-University Partnerships Work, The Key Factors." In A. Hart, E. Maddison, and D. Wolff, eds. *Community-University Partnerships in Practice*. Leicester: Niace: 183–194.

Smith, D. P., and L. Holt. 2007. "Studentification and 'Apprentice' Gentrifiers within Britain's Provincial Towns and Cities: Extending the Meaning of Gentrification." *Environment and Planning A*, (39): 142–161.

Sunderland, N., G. Muirhead, R. Parsons, and D. Holtom. 2004. "The Australian Consortium on Higher Education, Community Engagement and Social Responsibility." Report, Queensland: University of Queensland.

University of Brighton. 2007. *Corporate Plan 2007–2012*. Brighton: University of Brighton.

University of Cambridge. 2005. *Community Engagement Report 2003–4. A Report on the University of Cambridge's Outreach Activities*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.

## **Author Information**

Professor Angie Hart is the academic director of the award-winning Community University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton with 18 years experience in research and teaching in health and social care. She is also a community practitioner in child and family mental health. As the adoptive parent of three children from the care system, she has much experience herself as a service user of health and social care services in both the voluntary and statutory sector.

Professor Andrew Church is Professor of Human Geography at the University of Brighton. His research is concerned with the environmental, economic, and social aspects of outdoor leisure. He is the associate academic director of the University of Brighton Community University Partnership Programme. He has more than 20 years of undertaking joint research with community and voluntary sector.

Angie Hart  
CUPP/School of Nursing and Midwifery  
264 Mayfield House  
Falmer  
Brighton  
BN1 9RT  
E-mail: A.Hart@brighton.ac.uk  
Telephone: +44 (0)1273 644051  
Fax: +44 (0) 1273 644541

Andrew Church  
E-mail: a.church@bton.ac.uk