

# Evaluation Report Phase 2

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*Interact 2017*



**INTERACT**

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## SECTION ONE:

# Background and introduction

The Interact 2017 symposium was developed as a partnership between STFC, the Institute of Physics (IOP), the South East Physics network (SEPnet) and the University of Birmingham. Over the previous ten years the engagement landscape in the UK had shifted significantly, and the culture had shifted towards engagement being valued, rewarded and encouraged. The symposium was designed to build on these changes in the UK STEM community. The aim of Interact was to **cultivate a community** of engagement practitioners within the physical sciences who develop **high quality creative STEM engagement** and **encourage a culture of strategic and reflective practice**.

After Interact 2017 an evaluation report was produced. This was based on the record of attendees and registration data, the workshop selection process, and the post-symposium evaluation survey (Phase 1). A year after the symposium a follow up evaluation survey (Phase 2) was conducted, and the three key objectives highlighted above were included in the follow up survey which has been used in this report.

The response rate was a lot lower for Phase 2 than Phase 1. This is unsurprising – people are more likely to respond when the event is still fresh. From Phase one, approximately 85 of the 129 conference attendees responded to the survey, equivalent to 70% of attendees. For Phase two, a year later, approximately 39 responses, equivalent to 30% of conference attendees responded.

This report will focus on how the intention to act as a result of Interact 2017 (“intent”) compares with actual actions (‘completed’). This comparison (“overall”) will allow for rich discussion into how the project partners can support Public Engagement in the future.

It should be noted that an individual’s responses from Phase 1 and Phase 2 cannot be linked together. This means it is difficult to compare the results from Phase 1 and 2 accurately or precisely. However we asked respondents if the intention to act was a personal objective they wrote down at the end of the 2017. This measurements in post surveys allows us to compare the survey results with some more depth (“Objective Baseline” in both Phase 1 and 2).

STFC, IOP and SEPnet will continue to run the next Interact symposium, taking place in Preston at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) on Wednesday 4 September 2019. The symposium will be even bigger in 2019 and to achieve this the planning group has expanded to include more partners from a wide range of scientific organisations, namely RAS, RSC, Ogden Trust and public engagement experts at UCLan.

## Understanding who responded to Phase 2

As can be seen from Figure 1 below there are differences in the career types of respondents to the Phase 2 survey compared to Phase 1. These are not huge but will help to contextualise some of the results later in the report. We must also note that around half the number of attendees responded to phase two compared to phase one (38 vs 77). The main difference in the career types of respondents is that a higher proportion of OPE professionals responded to phase two, and a lower proportion of PhD students and ECRs. This is explored later in the report to place survey results in context relative to career type.

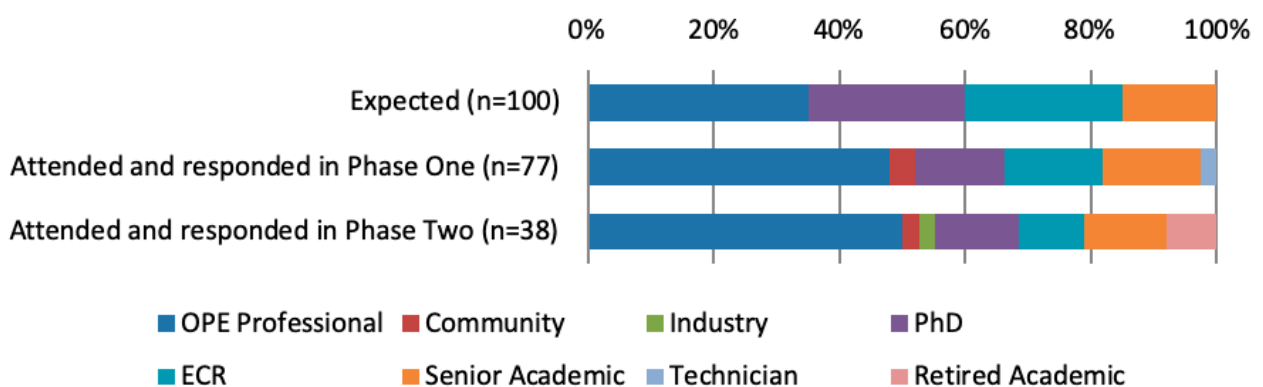


Figure 1. Respondents career type. The top bar shows the organisers expected distribution and the lower bars are the reported career types from respondents split by Phase 1 and Phase 2 data.

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## Objective One: To cultivate a community

(a) Run a symposium with over 130 people attending, where 65% of those attending will be researchers in the physical sciences who carry engagement activities alongside and as part of their research.

Not including organisers 129 people registered as attending Interact 2017. It is estimated that an additional 5-10 people attended without checking in at the registration desk, bringing the total to above the target of 130. Of those attending just over 50% were researchers in the physical sciences who carry out engagement activities alongside their research. This is below the target of 65%. For Interact 2019 the organisers will be targeting advertising at this particular group to raise the numbers of attendees. For full discussion please see report one.

(b) Over 95% of the content of the programme will be generated by those attending the sessions. Over 50% of these sessions will be delivered by researchers.

29 of the 31 workshops (94%) were from ideas submitted by those attending, which is approximately at our 95% target. 34% of the sessions were delivered by researchers, which is short of our 50% target. However, many of the workshops delivered by OPE professionals included presenters who were researchers, or details on activities being carried out by researchers. For full discussion please see report one.

(c) Over 50% of those attending will have networked and created links with others who have similar engagement interests to them.

Over 56% of respondents to the second phase of evaluation said that they had networked with someone they met at the conference. This matches the 56% of respondents that intended to network from Phase 1. The response data can be seen in Figure 2.

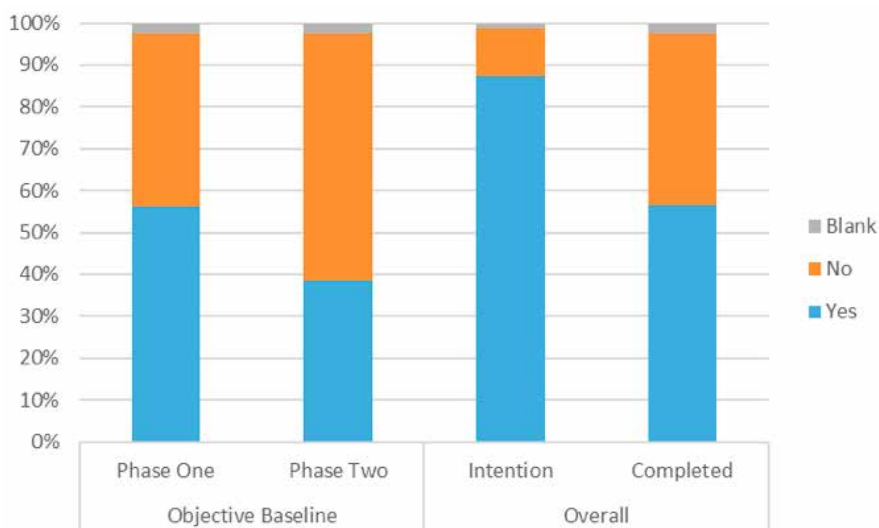


Figure 2: Those who reported networking during the conference. The left panel shows those who set networking as an objective, and is broken down to the Phase 1 and Phase 2 data. The right panel shows those who networked overall. Many of these reported networking as an intention although they had not set it as an objective.

This analysis can be further broken down by career type. Figure 3 shows that although the number of OPE professionals and researchers who intended to network was very similar (49% compared to 43%), fewer researchers reported this aim as being completed (68% of OPE professionals say they networked compared to 23% of researchers). This may be due to the fact that the physics OPE community is smaller than the academic physics community so more OPE professionals may have known each other previously. This would help instigate more networking between members of the OPE community than between other attendees. This is something the organisers will take into account when planning networking time for the next conference and will try to actively include researchers. The career type of respondents to the Phase 2 survey shows us that a lower proportion of PhDs and ECRs responded to Phase 2 compared to Phase 1. One cause of this could be short term contracts on academia – meaning that the follow up survey went to a previous email address. To help combat this for Interact 2019 we will also send the Phase 2 survey out over mailing lists attendees are likely to be on (such as psci-comm) and will also share the survey link over social media.

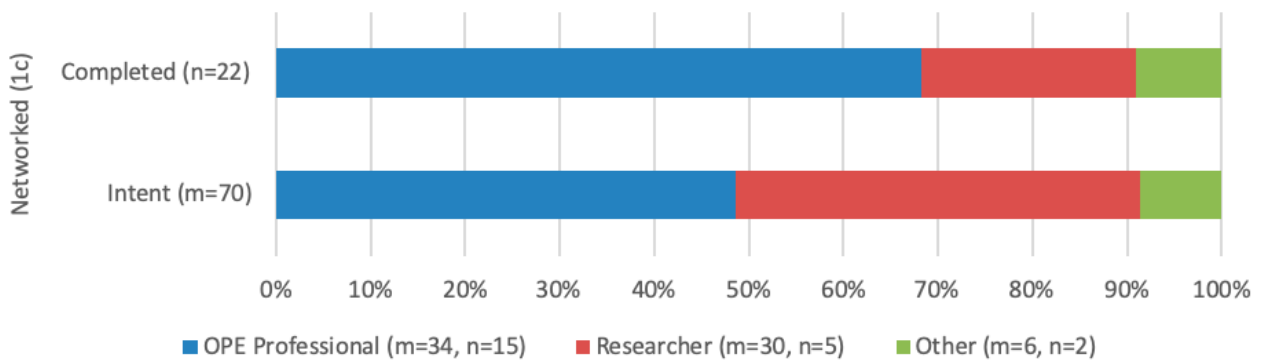


Figure 3. Number of those who intended to network and who did network split by career type.

The symposium has acted as the planning group had hoped, as a place to connect those with similar public engagement interests who may not have otherwise met. Interact 2019 will aim to have a strong social media presence and the planning committee will ensure attendees are encouraged to network with one another throughout the day.

**(d) Have another symposium within 2 years of the current symposium.**

The next Interact symposium will take place on 4 September 2019 at the UCLan.

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## Objective Two: Higher quality STEM engagement

(a) Over a third of those attending will change how they approach a current project based on learning from Interact.

There is a significant drop between the percentage of participants who intended to change how they approached a current project compared to the percentage that actually changed the approach. These are as 71% and 46% respectively. Therefore, the objective that over a third of respondents changed their approach to an existing public engagement project based on learning from the symposium was reached. This can be seen in Figure 4.

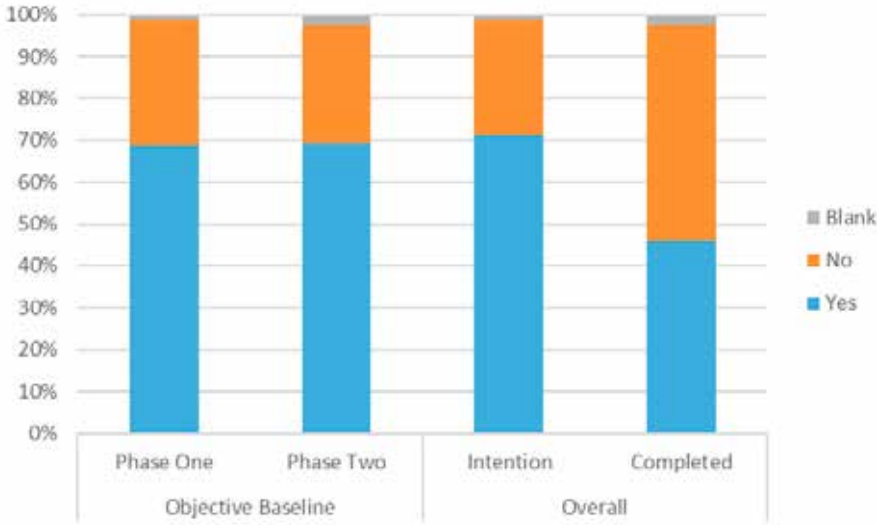


Figure 4. Those that reported changing how the approached a project based on learning from Interact. The left panel shows those who set this as an objective, split by phase one and phase two evaluation data. The right panel shows the overall number who has this as an intention, and those that reported they had fulfilled that intention.

Some attendees gave explicit examples of how their practice has changed as a result of Interact 2017. A few reported becoming more reflective towards their public engagement practice and reading more literature on the topic. Others' comments focused on their raised awareness of public engagement opportunities and support, and how they have used this to increase the amount of public engagement they are doing. One person reported that they have increased their use of social media for public engagement. There were also a couple of comments which focused on building public engagement into everyday research. One person reports now including public engagement on research proposals, and another has published a paper on the public engagement project they developed.

This data can be further broken down by career type of attendee. Figure 5 shows those who aimed to change a project as a result of Interact, and those who reported completing this aim. We did not specify target numbers for different career types but it is interesting to see the split is fairly equal between OPE professionals and researchers (49% against 42%). This split is carried through to the numbers reporting they had completed this aim, with

fairly equal numbers of OPE professionals and researchers reporting they had made a change (50% against 40%).

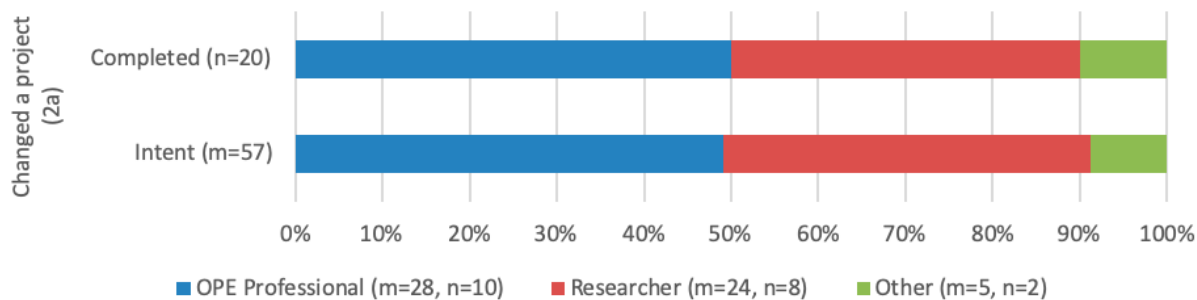


Figure 5. Break down by career type of responses to whether attendees had changed a project as a result of attending Interact.

(b) 15 new public engagement projects will be initiated as a result of symposium. Over half of these would have gone through a competitive process such as the IOP Grant Scheme and the STFC Small Awards throughout 2017 and 2018.

Figure 6 shows that 36% of respondents started a new public engagement project a year after attending Interact. This is equivalent to 14 individuals and 14 new projects however if scaled to include the 129 attendees this is equal to 46 projects. The sample size may be too small to extrapolate this data, however 38 respondents shared that they intended to start new projects in the first phase of the symposium evaluation.

Two of these new projects applied for public engagement funding. One of these applications was successful and the outcome of the other is unknown.

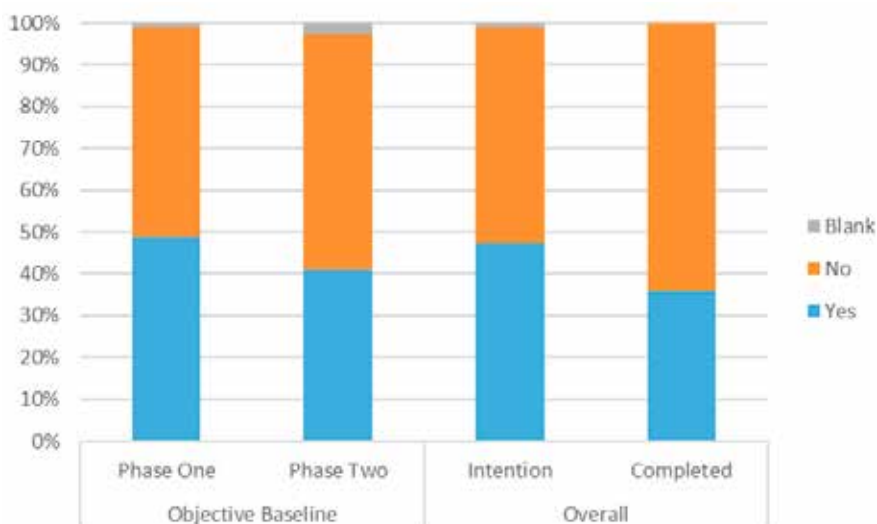


Figure 6. Number of respondents that reported starting a new public engagement project as a result of the Interact conference. The left panel shows those who set this as an objective, split by Phase 1 and Phase 2 data. The right panel shows the overall number of respondents who reported intending to start a new project, and the number who then did this.



In Figure 7 we have broken down these results by career type of the attendees. More researchers than OPE professionals reported an intent to start a new project (50% of researchers compared to 42% of OPE professionals). However, more OPE professionals reported completing this aim than researchers (36% of those who completed this aim are and 50% of OPE professionals). No researchers have commented in the survey as to why they did not complete this aim. This is a question we may be able to follow up more thoroughly in the second conference.

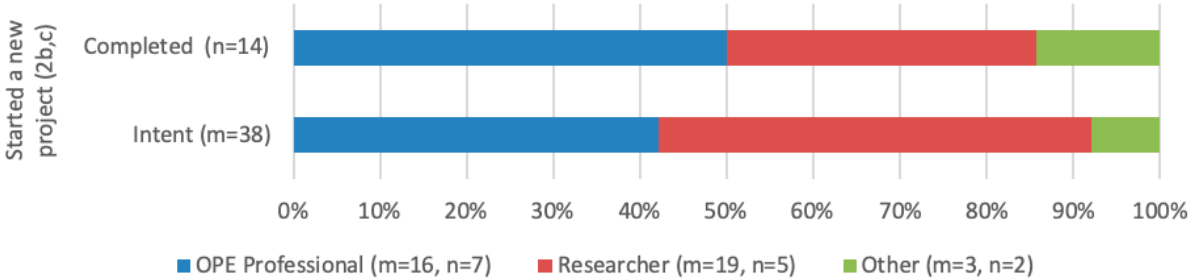


Figure 7. Those who intended to start a new project against those who reported completing this intention. The data is split by career type of respondent.

**(c) One of these projects will be awarded an engagement award. This could be from the NCCPE, SEPnet, IOP etc.**

The intention of including this objective was to track this over a longer time period. In this survey we did not ask specifically about recognition awards received for public engagement projects. In the comments we collected some information around funding awards.

Although it is difficult to track how many Interact attendees applied to IOP and STFC public engagement awards in 2017 and 2018, one respondent in the second phase of the evaluation indicated that they applied for STFC funding as a result of attending the symposium. The outcome of this application is unknown.

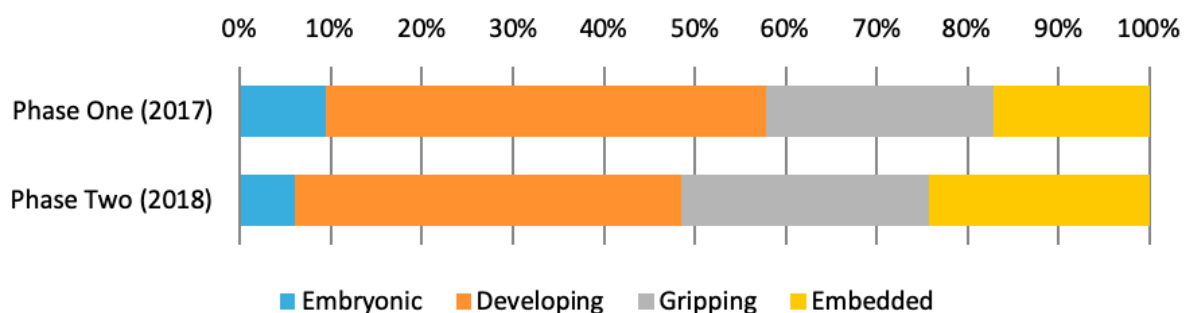
Two other respondents commented about applying for other funding and being awarded it. One specified that this funding was from Wellcome/ EEF funding and the other did not include the funding body. For the 2019 Interact conference we will expand the survey questions asked to explicitly include funding body applied to and whether this was awarded.

After Interact 2019 we will start asking specifically about public engagement recognition awards, to track the impact projects originating through Interact are having.

## Objective Three: Encourage a culture of strategic and reflective practice

The following three objectives all aim for participants to make a change to their personal approaches to public engagement, including their approach to evaluation and knowledge exchange. This report has looked at participants' views of how embedded public engagement is within an individual's department using the EDGE tool<sup>1</sup>. The EDGE tool was developed by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement as a method of assessing an institution's approach to embedding public engagement. It allows the user to rate their institution's approach as either 'Embryonic', 'Developing', 'Gripping' or 'Embedded'.

Figure 8 shows a shift in the role of public engagement within attendees' departments in just a year. Fewer respondents rated public engagement as embryonic within their department (5% compared to 8% in 2017). More participants said public engagement was gripping (23%) or embedded (21%) in their department a year later.



**Figure 8. Respondents rating of how embedded public engagement is in their institutions using the edge tool. Data is split by Phase 1 and Phase 2 responses.**

The percentage increases may be due to who the respondents to the second phase of evaluation were. One might expect OPE professionals to have more embedded public engagement work so an increased percentage in responses from OPE professionals might explain this shift. However, the response rate from OPE professional is only 2% higher for Phase 2 compared to Phase 1 (Figure 1, at start of report) which doesn't account for the 7% increase in respondents who described public engagement as embedded within their department.

Figure 9 shows the Phase 1 and the Phase 2 data on how respondents rated their department using the EDGE tool. This is split by career type. Here we can see that in Phase 1, 22% of OPE professionals and 27% of researchers rated their institution as 'developing', whereas in Phase 2, 15% of OPE professionals and 24% of researchers said this. We see a similar trend in the data for the 'gripping' rating – in Phase 1, 9% of OPE professionals and 13%

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support-engagement/strategy-and-planning/edge-tool/introducing-edge-tool>

of researchers gave their institution this rating, compared to 12% of OPE professionals and 12% of researchers in Phase 2.

The most drastic change can be seen in those who classified public engagement as 'embedded' in their institution. In Phase 1, 3% of OPE professionals and 13% of researchers gave their institution this rating, whereas in Phase 2 this shifted to 15% of OPE professionals and 6% of researchers.

Overall the OPE respondents who responded to the Phase 2 survey have moved towards the 'embedded' end of the scale, whereas the researchers who responded have clustered in the 'developing/gripping' middle section. As noted above it is perhaps unsurprising that OPE professionals may have more embedded public engagement work, as programmes are likely to have already been more established when the Interact conference took place. The clustering of the researchers in the middle section of the ratings, shifting away from the higher end, is interesting.

This may be because those who responded to Phase 2 have now had a year during which they have engaged more deeply with public engagement, which may have caused them to assess their activity more critically than they might have done at the time of the symposium. It will be interesting to repeat this measurement at the second Interact conference to see if there is any change to this trend.

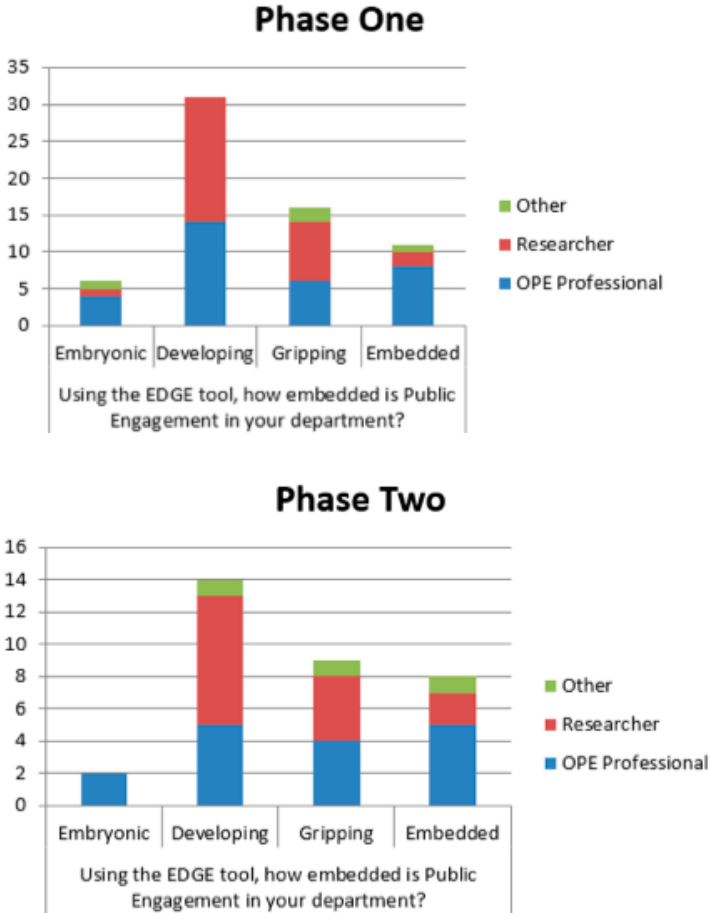


Figure 9. Phase 1 and Phase 2 data on how the respondents rated their institution using the EDGE tool.

Interestingly, and perhaps troubling, there is a general shift in respondents receiving less support from their department from 2017 to 2018 as seen in Figure 10. Only a third of survey respondents from Phase 2 felt they receive plenty of support from their department to run public engagement. This could reflect how people feel having just attended a conference compared to a year on. It will be interesting to see how this compares after Interact 2019 to see if more people feel supported again.

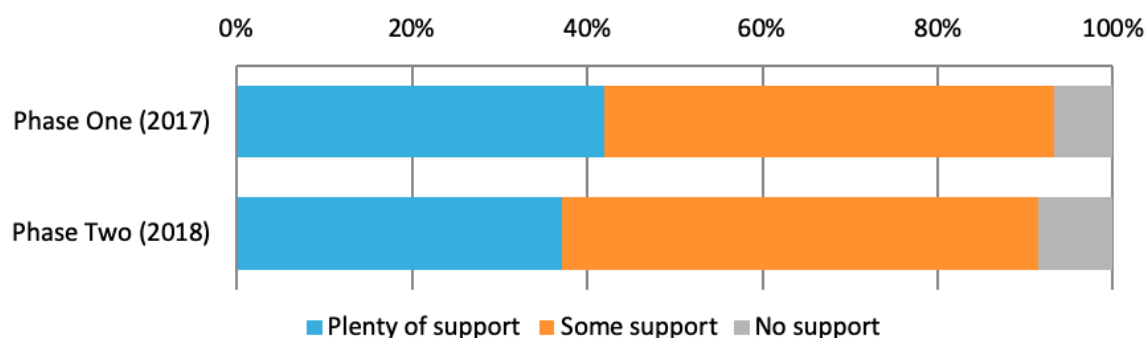


Figure 10. Level of departmental support. Data is split by responses from phase one and phase two of evaluation.

Our specific aims related to encouraging a culture of strategic and reflective practice are listed below.

**Over half of those attending will:**

(a) Change how they view their PE activities, thinking of them as part of a wider strategy rather than one-off activities.

(b) Take more of their Public Engagement time after to reflect on their engagement activities, including evaluation, dissemination and reflection.

(c) Take more of their Public Engagement time to look for evaluation reports from previous activities similar to those they are planning.

Following on from report one the Phase 2 survey asked a single question based on each of the behaviours in aims 3 a-c. We then asked if these behaviours had changed due to Interact. Figure 11 shows those who set changing any of these behaviours as an objective, broken down by Phase 1 and Phase 2 data, alongside the overall number of respondents who reported an intention to make a change and those who reported that this had been completed. Based on Phase 2 data 41% of respondents reported having changed a behaviour as a result of the Interact conference. This is lower than our aim of 50% but similar to the 39% who reported that it was their intention to change a behaviour. There are some comments in the survey response which explain why a change wasn't made in some of these cases. The general theme of these comments was around a lack of time, and on difficulties following up with others from the conference (emails not replied to, loss of momentum). These may be interesting themes to explore in more depth at the second conference.

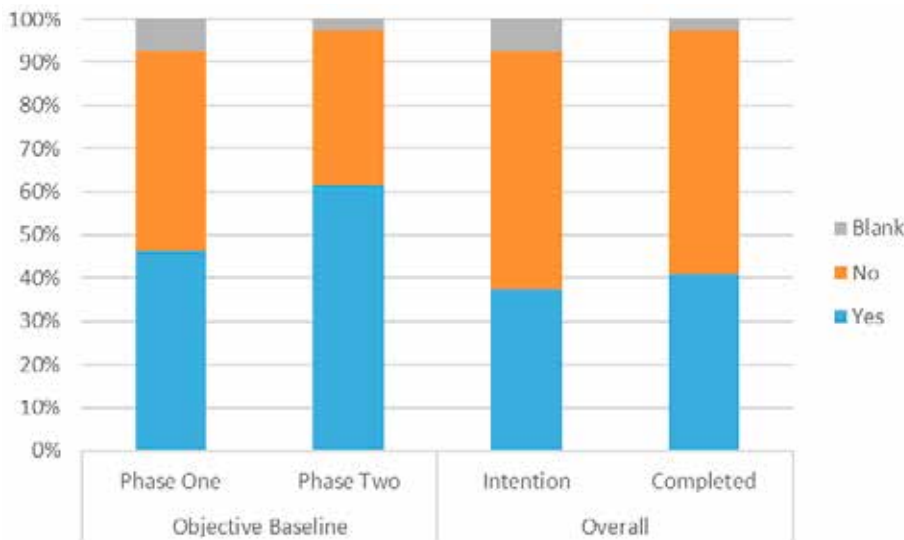


Figure 11. Number of respondents reporting changed behaviour following the Interact conference. The left panel shows how many set this as an objective split by Phase 1 and 2 data, and the right panel shows the overall number who intended to change their behaviour against the number who reported that their behaviour had changed.

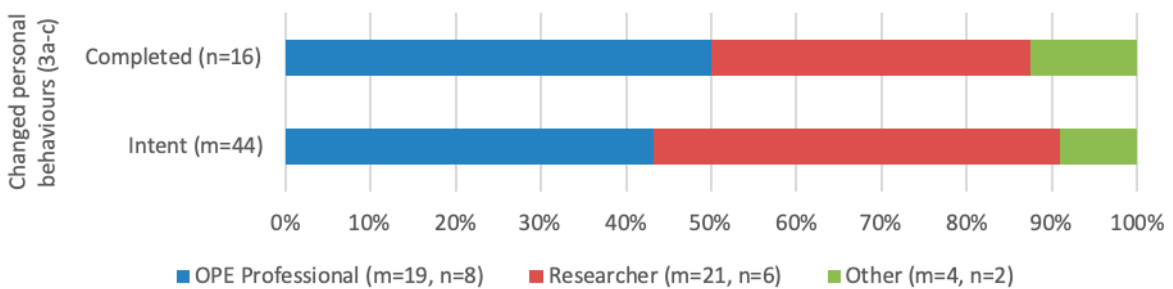


Figure 12. Those who intended change a behaviour against those who reported completing this intention. The data is split by career type of respondent.

Figure 12 shows this data split by career type. We can see that a larger proportion of the OPE professionals reported changing behaviour than had said they intended to do so. Inversely, a larger proportion of the researchers intended to change a behaviour than reported having completed this. This is likely to be due to researchers having research pressures on their time, in addition to public engagement, so having less time to embed a change into their public engagement. Of the researchers who made comments about why they had not made changes the responses given were around time ('been too busy') and around difficulty in implementing changes across their department ('inertia in doing things the same way'). Adversely, as the OPE professionals will have run multiple public engagement projects since the conference they may have had more scope to implement changes.

Figure 13 shows data on the level of perceived change in how embedded public engagement is in the respondents' institutions. 43% those who classified some/nearly all of their public engagement as embedded in their institutions said that these behaviours had changed as a result of the

symposium. This compared to 53% who reported no change. All of those who said that none of their public engagement activities were embedded in their department also reported no change in this. As public engagement was least embedded in these institutions initially they will have the most work to do to make it part of the culture.

43% reported a change in how embedded public engagement is in their department, which is a little below our 50% target. It will be interesting to keep monitoring this at the next Interact symposium and beyond, to see how this changes further over time.

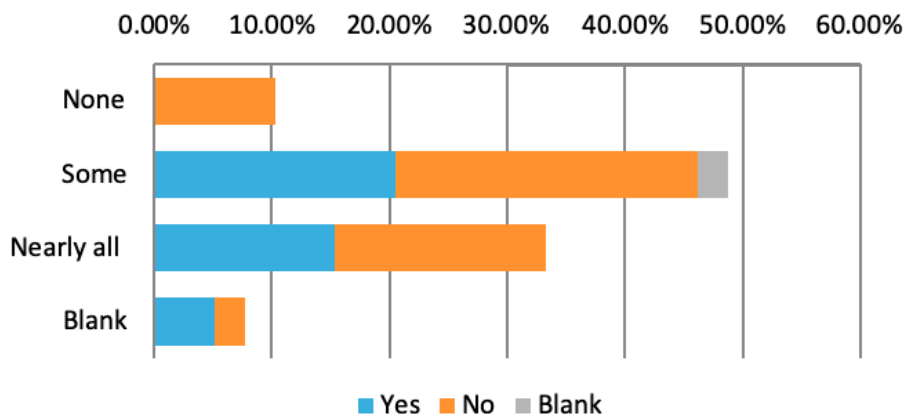


Figure 13. Answers to 'How embedded is your individual public engagement activity with the rest of your department's activities?' crossed with whether this has changed since the symposium.

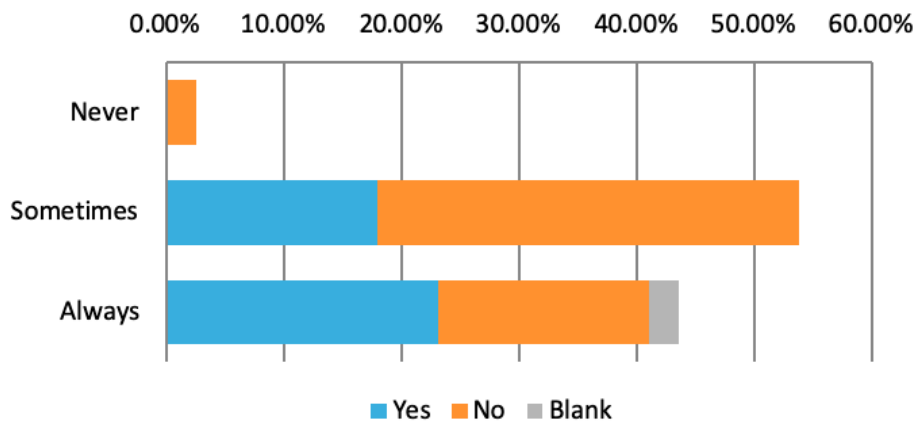


Figure 14. Answers to 'Do you take time to reflect on your own public engagement activities?' crossed with whether this has changed since the symposium.

We asked if respondents took time to reflect on their public engagement activities. The data is displayed in Figure 14. Only 3% said they never took time to reflect, with 97% saying they sometimes or always did. Overall 41% of respondents said there was a change in these behaviours after the conference, with 57% saying there was no change and the rest leaving the question blank. This is a bit lower than our aim that 50% of respondents

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would change this behaviour. This may be because more respondents say they were already taking time to reflect on their public engagement to some degree.

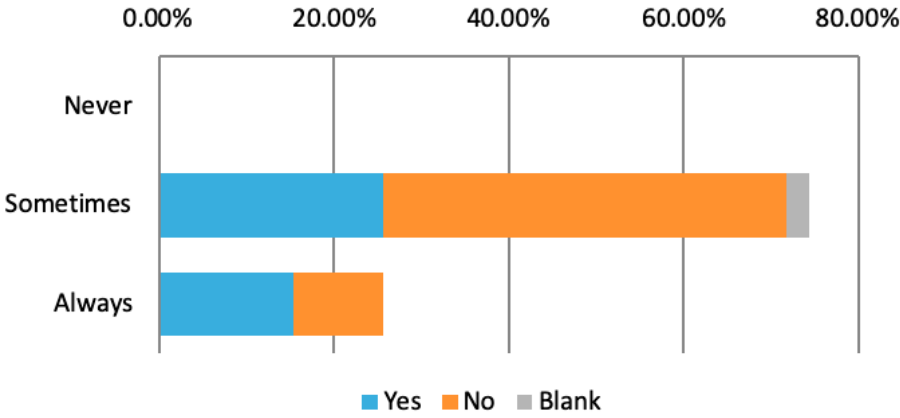


Figure 15. Answers of 'Do you take time to look at wider practice in the public engagement community?' crossed with whether this has changed since the symposium.

Figure 15 shows the respondents assessments of how often they reflect on wider practice in the public engagement community crossed with whether this has changed since the symposium. Everyone who responded said they do this already, with 75% saying they sometimes do and 25% saying they always do. Overall 41% of these said that their behaviour had changed since the symposium. This is the same percentage as reported change in taking time to reflect on their own public engagement activities. Again, the change rate is below our aim of 50% but may be because the respondents are all already looking at wider public engagement practice to some extent.

## SECTION TWO: Summary of Phase 2 results

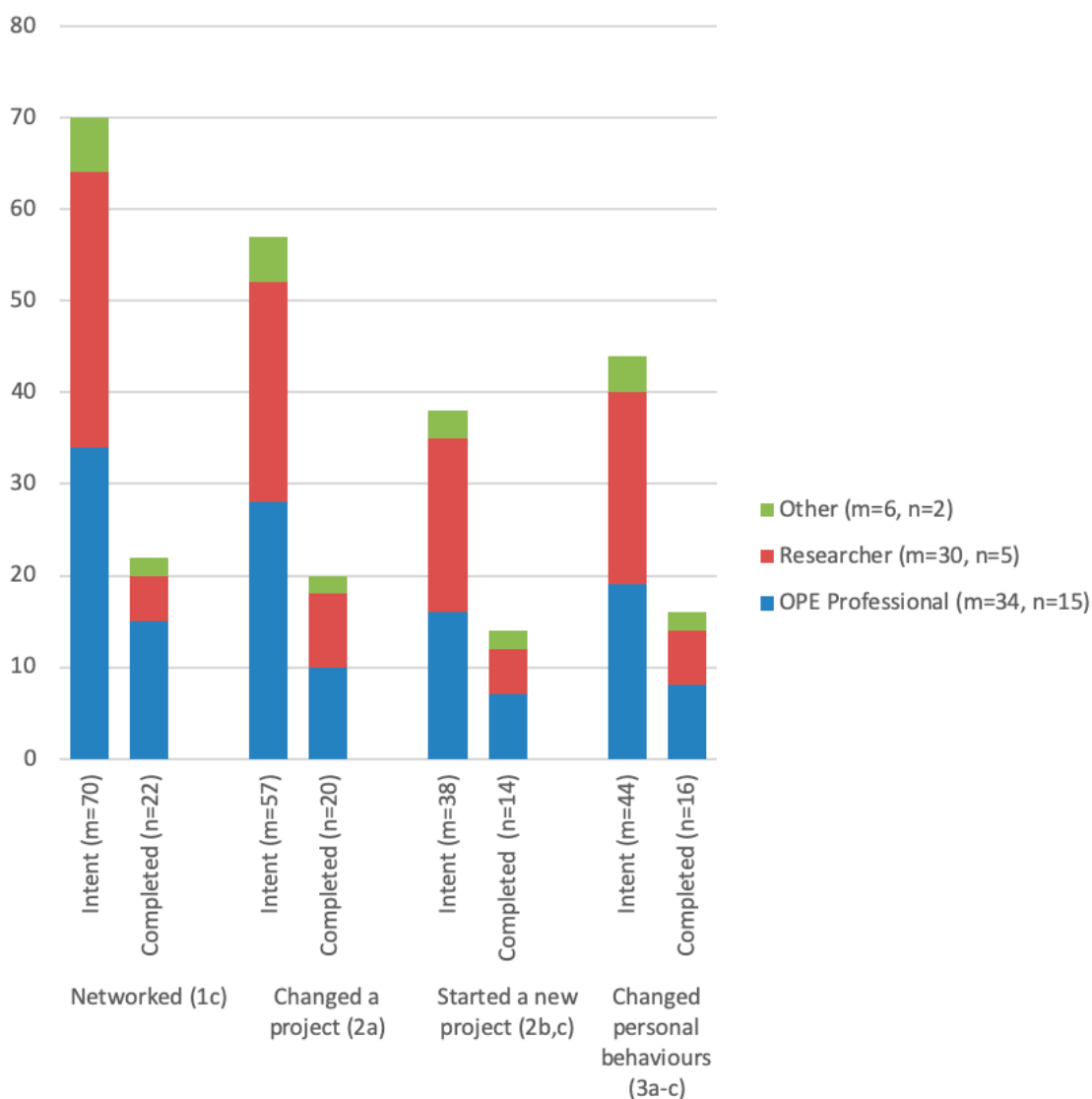


Figure 16. Summary plot showing each aim of the Interact symposium. These are broken down by number of respondents who intended to meet this aim and those who reported meeting it. The data is also split by career type.

Figure 16 summarises the data collected during Phase 2 evaluation on each of the Interact objectives.

Objective 1c was **'Over 50% of those attending will have networked and created links with others who have similar engagement interests to them.'** In the Phase 2 data 56% of attendees reported having networked.

Objective 2a was **'Over a third of those attending will change how they approach a current project based on learning from Interact.'** In the Phase 2, data 46% of attendees reported having changed how they approached a project.



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Objectives 2 and c were '15 new public engagement projects will be initiated as a result of symposium. Over half of these would have gone through a competitive process such as the IOP Grant Scheme and the STFC Small Awards throughout 2017 and 2018' and 'One of these projects will be awarded an engagement award. This could be from the NCCPE, SEPnet, IOP etc'. Of those who responded to the Phase 2 survey 14 said they had begun new projects. Two respondents commented that they had applied for funding and being awarded it.

Objectives 3 a-c were 'Over half of those attending will:

(a) Change how they view their PE activities, thinking of them as part of a wider strategy rather than one-off activities.

(b) Take more of their Public Engagement time after to reflect on their engagement activities, including evaluation, dissemination and reflection.

(c) Take more of their Public Engagement time to look for evaluation reports from previous activities similar to those they are planning.

Analysing these collectively 41% of those who responded to the Phase 2 survey said they had made a change because of the Interact symposium.







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