

# EVALUATION SUMMARY:

## PEAS IN PODS: Co-production Of Community Based Public Engagement for Data and AI Research.

November 2025



# PEAs in Pods

Community | Engagement | Research

## Introduction

This evaluation report summarises the activities and impact of the UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) Grant Ref: EP/W033488/1: **PEAS in PODs: Co-production Of Community Based Public Engagement For Data And AI Research** (2022 – 2025).

Led by Professor Keeley Crockett from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), with Co-Investigators Dr Caitlin Nunn and Dr Sarah Linn (MMU) and in partnership with Noisy Cricket, the University of Manchester (UoM) and the University of Salford, the project proposed an innovative intervention which aimed to empower the Greater Manchester (GM) Research and Development community to engaged meaningfully with traditionally marginalised communities and embed co-production methods into individual and institutional research processes and governance. This was achieved through the recruitment, training, mentorship and experiential learning of ‘PEAS’: Public Engagement Ambassadors, who are either early career scholars from MMU, The University of Salford, UoM or working in Manchester based SMEs. The PEAs worked across three interrelated ‘PODs’: POD 1 focused on training the PEAS to conduct community engaged research. POD 2 provided mentorship from Professor Keeley Crockett to support PEAS on their community-engaged research journey through, and POD 3 provided an opportunity to ‘learn by doing’ through working with three marginalised Manchester communities to co-create community outputs centred supporting their communities to engage in AI developments.

This document provides a project evaluation which summarises project activities and outcomes alongside the projects aims and objectives using quantitative and qualitative data captured throughout the life-course of the project. This data includes reflective circles, images, creative outputs, interviews with community members and PEAS and project surveys with different stakeholder groups.

With special mention to Linda and Les, who contributed their time and expertise to the project and who both sadly passed away before the close of the project.

This document is compiled by Dr Sarah Linn.

### Key aims of PEAS in PODS:

- 1) To increase the public engagement and coproduction skills and confidence of PEAs through training, reflective mentoring and “learning-by-doing”.
- 2) To increase knowledge about data-driven technology and AI research among community participants and create the conditions for community members to participate as active stakeholders in research and design processes.
- 3) To demonstrate the benefits of coproduction methods to the Greater Manchester Research & Design community, as a powerful way to align research to ethical principles and real-world societal needs, especially those of traditionally marginalised communities.
- 4) To nurture sustained relationships between PEAs, research institutions and traditionally marginalised communities and embed such interactions into institutional research processes.

### Key objectives of PEAS in PODS:

- 1) **Pod 1: Train 20 researchers (from the universities of MMU, Manchester and Salford and local SMEs via the GM AI Foundry) in coproduction.**
- 2) **Deliver an Ideation event at the end of Pod 1.** Community participants will be involved in this process that will develop ideas for three separate, coproduced, community based programmes of inspirational public engagement events/activities about data science and AI research with PEAS.
- 3) **Pod 2: Support PEAs with quarterly 1h reflective mentoring sessions.**
- 4) **Pod 2: Develop 12-month public engagement action plans with each PEA** to encourage on-going involvement between the researchers and community groups or others.
- 5) **Pod 3: Guide PEAs and community co-researchers to coproduce, deliver and evaluate a programme of inspirational public engagement activities.** Programme formats could involve arts-based methods, workshops, community events or novel approaches as each project team decides what is most appropriate for their communities. Each community project will have a budget of £7,000.
- 6) **Use evaluation of Pod 3 to coproduce a “Data Ethics and AI in a Box” legacy resource** for on-going self-guided learning and researcher engagement about data-driven and AI technologies and ethics across communities.
- 7) **Co-develop with the host and partner universities (MMU, Manchester and Salford), PEAs and communities, mechanisms to integrate sustained researcher-community interaction into research processes.**

## TRACKING PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- 7 Project Roadshows held across MMU, UoM, University of Salford to support recruitment of ECRs to project, which had 60 Eventbrite signups and 5 additional in-person arrivals at events
- 23 potential PEAS from SMES, MMU, UoM and University of Salford attended and completed Community Engagement Training
- 11 PEAS recruited to continue into POD 2 and POD 3 to work on collaborative community engaged projects
- 3 Communities recruited to work on projects (Back on Track, Tatton, Inspire), with 21 community members engaging in different capacities throughout the projects
- 61 hours of mentoring sessions between Professor Keeley Crockett and PEAS, with PEAS receiving on average between 3 -5 hours each.
- 2 Independent Community Member Consultants advised throughout the project.
- 3 Public Outputs created and distributed
- 8 Government (Local and National) events where PEA project activities were promoted
- 7 Public Facing Events where PEA project activities were promoted
- 43 Academic and Industry Events where PEA project activities were promoted
- AI Ethics in a box – a set of resources developed during the PEAs in PODs Project for ongoing self-guided learning and researcher engagement on data-driven and AI technologies and ethics across communities.
- Training programme - aims to support researchers, students, and research and development professionals working in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data-driven technologies (DDT) to meaningfully engage with, learn from, and collaborate with the communities impacted by their work.
- Project Website [HOME - PEAs in Pods](#)
- 1 peer reviewed conference paper and 3 media articles.

## EVALUATION

**AIM 1: To increase the public engagement and coproduction skills and confidence of PEAs through training, reflective mentoring and “learning-by-doing”.**

All PEAS were trained in community-engaged research over 4 afternoon training sessions of 4 hours each during April and May 2023 in what was described as POD 1. The training was designed and led by Dr Keeley Crockett, Dr Caitlin Nunn and Lauren Coulman, with contributions from Dr Sarah Linn, Edwin Coyler and Linda Parsonage. The training was designed as a combination of lectures, interactive activities, PEA-led activities and reflective exercises which covered diverse topics to ensure a thorough training of PEAs on community engaged research. These materials have been developed into a publicly accessible training program for wider use in the academy made available on the PEAS in PODS Website: [Training Modules - PEAs in Pods](#). PEAS were then supported in ‘learning by doing’ in POD 3 as they worked with local communities to co-create outputs, through hourly mentorship meetings with Professor Keeley Crockett in POD 2.

PEAs had joined the program for a variety of reasons. For some, existing experiences in working with communities, including volunteering, drove their interest in the project, whilst others were interested in gaining new skills and capacities. Many PEAs expressed an interest in the opportunity to collaboratively work in communities, particularly as so many worked in laboratory settings away from ‘real world’ applications. This provided an opportunity to develop skills and to work alongside both new colleagues and communities.

Some PEAs expressed an assurance in their knowledge of participatory or publicly engaged research at the outset of training and **‘just wanted to get out to the communities’ to begin co-creation**. However, at the close of the training session a number admitted that with hindsight they had been **overly confident in their existing knowledge** and that the training program had prepared them far more thoroughly for the ethical realities of co-produced, community-engaged research and provided space to engage more critically with what it meant to do this work. Specifically, **an**

**emphasis on defining ‘community’ and the complexities and considerations around this, as well as a focus on ‘power and positionality’ were both identified as instrumental to PEA learning.** In addition, the lack of control that is central to participatory projects was also an obstacle for some PEAS in anticipating how they would work with community members. As the projects progressed, some PEAS acknowledge the importance of ‘letting go of preconceived ideas’ about how they would work with communities in order to develop ideas together and the reality that at times they were not in control of how the project would progress because of its collaborative nature:

‘At the start I kind of had an idea of what it would look like, what we’re trying to do and then throughout, I lost that idea completely. I was pretty lost, throughout it. I [thought] :‘Wait, how’s this going to end up...?’ And we’ve kind of got that there....(but) you kind of need to trust the process’ (PEA, Reflective Circle, March 2024)

The training program was highly praised in reflective evaluations throughout the project, with **over 85% of PEAS agreeing or strongly agreeing that the training programme had prepared them for conducting community engaged research.**

However, PEAs also recognised the **limitation of training without application** (i.e. the need for POD 3) and the reality that a training program could not prepare them for every eventuality in community engaged research. The ‘open’ and unexpected nature of community engaged research was identified as a key area that could not be ‘trained’ or controlled for and thus could be intimidating:

‘I think what scares me a little bit is that completely sort of unscripted, unscaffolded approach to’ (PEA, Training Session Reflective Circle, April 2023)

I find the whole idea of co-production very chaotic. Because I don’t know what’s going to happen next. (PEA, Reflective Circle, March 2024)

Even at the project’s close, this continued to be identified amongst PEAS working on new community-engaged projects as a slippery and daunting area, as each new project presents a new community, new dynamics and new challenges. However, many expressed a desire to continue to incorporate public-engagement and co-production principles into their future research. In addition, some PEAS noted how co-production was in direct contrast to their typical research:

‘I’m used to just working alone, I decide how my research is going to be done. Normally my research doesn’t have any direct contact with people, I’m just working with data. Working with a community is completely different.’ (PEA Closing Interview, April 2025)

Interviews with PEAS, coupled with an anonymous survey indicated a very strong impact on the overall confidence and skills of PEAS in community engaged research. 100% of PEAS strongly agreed that working on the project had increased their understanding of community engaged research. 100% strong agreed that they would incorporate community engaged research into future research projects, whilst 65% states that they had already explored further opportunities to be involved in community engaged research (PEA anonymous survey, July 2024). Beyond the survey, several PEAs indicated in interviews and discussions with the research team a desire to continue working with communities and described a shift in their approach to research:

“It was a great opportunity to learn about community engagement, share knowledge and jointly collaborating with some amazing team members and with the communities to co-produce impactful solutions. The mentoring sessions with Prof Keeley have been amazing. The guidance has been incredible for my personal development. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this project.” (PEA anonymous survey, July 2024)

Mentoring was also highlighted as crucial to growing PEAs confidence and supporting them to reflect on their ongoing research, their career trajectories and their perspective on community-based research and whether this was something they wanted to pursue in their future research, with 100% of PEAs strongly agreeing that mentorship with Professor Crockett has been beneficial.

**AIM 2: To increase knowledge about data-driven technology and AI research among community participants and create the conditions for community members to participate as active stakeholders in research and design processes.**

## CREATING CONDITIONS FOR INCLUSION OF COMMUNITIES AS ACTIVE STAKEHOLDERS

The PEAs project worked in collaboration with the communities Back on Track, Inspire and Tatton/Ordsall. Communities were recruited through existing networks and relationships of the main research team and Noisy Cricket. Gatekeepers in these organisations were firstly approached, given an outline of the project and discussions were had about a proposed way of working. Once this was established, decisions were made regarding the best means of recruiting within the community, how to approach ethics processes, and how best to support community members active and ongoing participation.

Community members joined the project for diverse and interrelated reasons. This included:

- The opportunity to be involved in a wider community-based project with likeminded people
- A desire to do something good for their community.
- The opportunity to work alongside the University
- Personal interest in AI developments and a desire to be able to learn about it.

Recruitment centred around information sessions, where PEAS visited the local communities to introduce themselves and the project, outline potential benefits for being involved, and to discuss best ways of working collaboratively. The PEAs and the proposed ideas were well received, but community members also engaged with the content critically. For example, PEAs had developed some potential ideas of collaborative outputs to provide contextual examples to the community before the onset of the project. These were broadly rejected and replaced with other community-led suggestions. This engagement with, and rejection of potential outputs indicates a resilience and confidence in the community in understanding their position as knowledge holders. The position of PEAS, as early-career researchers who were ‘learning co-production’ by ‘doing’ alongside the communities was transparent, and community members expressed an appreciation for how this meant everyone was on a ‘learning journey’:

‘This was a new thing that we were doing...everyone was learning by doing, it was quite a big learning curve. It was a new thing for the PEA team as well, and I think they did really well.

PEA training focused on facilitating conditions for shared ideation and equal weighting of ideas from community members and PEAS. In practice, community members felt that their ideas were listened to and given equal weight to the contributions from PEAS, with 100% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their ideas and experiences were listened to (Community Survey, July 2024). However, given the nature of co-production, and the limited budget to implement 'blue sky' ideas, not all ideas were then able to be implemented.

To support conditions for community accessibility to the project and to support their involvement as active stakeholders, sessions with the community were held almost entirely within community spaces. This was to ensure the comfort and accessibility of participants, meeting them in their known environment and to minimise the disruption of travel. It also positioned them as community knowledge holders and decentred the position and authority of the University. The few exceptions to this predominantly related to events such as the official 'launch' of the project outputs, which was hosted on the MMU campus to support wider engagement with the created outputs. Conducting workshops within community-spaces was highlighted as an important consideration for community members. One community member emphasised that arriving at the University might be 'intimidating' and that being introduced to the project in a community space was essential to its success:

'Being introduced to the project at [a community space] where community members were comfortable, working with them as a partner, you can get beyond that initial difficulty of people not wanting to be involved...It's important to make sure projects like this continue to be accessible so different people can be involved' (Community member, closing interview January 2025)

In addition, travel outside of community spaces was considered a hinderance. Even though taxis were provided, for elderly participants the undertaking and logistics of travelling was still a tiresome activity and was raised in feedback sessions. Community members were also paid in vouchers for their involvement in the project (£15 per hour), and drinks and snacks or light lunches were provided to supplement their time.

The PEAS and research team were also supplemented by two lived-experience community researchers: Mooch and Linda. Sadly, Linda passed away during the course of the project. However, Mooch continued to be involved until its completion. These lived-experience community researchers provided a crucial bridging role between the PEAs and University research team and community members. They provided PEAS with advice and input in how to structure sessions to maximise the comfort and inclusion of community voices, and to assure community members in early coproduction sessions through insight about their previous involvement in projects.

### INCREASING KNOWLEDGE OF AI & DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Sessions were initially centred around wider conversations about lived experiences of the community, the impact of data and AI technologies on wider society and the potential impacts of this on the communities, before narrowing to focus on specific themes or co-produced community outputs.

Community members described complex feelings towards an increasingly digital age and the growth and prevalence of AI. This presented as caution, frustration or wariness, accompanied by some occasional enthusiasm of its possibilities or a benign indifference and acceptance of the inevitable digital changes underfoot.

‘I was interested in (AI) because some of it will be useful. But there is stuff that freaks me out, like deep fakes, convincing people that something is real’ (Community member closing interview, January 2025)

‘I believe that AI is good. For a lot of things. But not for all things.’ (Community member closing interview, December 2024)

‘AI can provide a lot of solutions for broader society, but we need to be asking: Does this solution provide an advantage or disadvantage for ordinary people?’ (Community member closing interview, December 2024)

Some expressed significant concern for how AI would impact their specific community and were well researched and educated on AI developments. Some felt that the industry was being shaped by profit and was indifferent to the impacts on marginalised communities, or those who were vulnerable to being ‘left behind’ by AI technologies. A few had been involved in other co-production MMU AI projects overseen by Professor Crockett and were very engaged in advocating for marginalised and seldom-heard from communities. Community members raised the role of ‘people’ within AI technology creation and how this compromised a sense of trust with the technology. For example, a concern that the intentions of ‘people’ involved in AI could not be discerned, and that AI was being adopted without due diligence for its potentially negative impacts on society.

‘The people at the top...seem entitled to do whatever they want....AI development just seems to be unfettered...we need scrutiny and control, there isn’t enough critical thinking’.  
(Community member closing interview, December 2024)

From project interviews and surveys, community members agreed that the project had impacted their understanding of data and AI technologies. Understanding ranged from a growth of critical concern about who was behind AI technologies, the AI ‘blackbox’ and how AI could be implemented, to a growing appreciation for how the technology could be harnessed to have positive impacts on society. From a community project survey, 100% participants agreed or strongly agreed that their involvement in the project had increased their awareness of the application of AI:

‘I have much more awareness of (AI) now. I can see how algorithms work. I can see: “AI has been used here”’ (PEA community member closing interview, December 2025)

‘I had always thought of AI as bad. But now, I kind of understand how artificial intelligence can be a good. It could help people find a job. I want to keep looking at (it) in a good way. I was...(only) seeing the bad’ (Community Reflective Circle, March 2023)

Community members recognised that their experience on the project positioned them as potential advocates for community inclusion in AI development and many expressed a desire to continue growing their knowledge and understanding of AI. One participant felt that the lasting impact of the project would be:

“Raising awareness of AI and being a community champion and go to person about AI.”  
(Community Anonymous Survey, July 2024)

Communities also believed that their co-produced outputs with PEAS would have positive impact upon their immediate communities, but that there might be wider application, dependent on a considered and engaged approach to dissemination beyond their existing communities.

Whilst there was a clear enthusiasm and engagement amongst all communities about the projects, the capacity to be involved on an ongoing basis was dependent on individual circumstances. All projects found that they worked with a core group of community members, which was supplemented by a wider group of interested, but less present, community members, which is typical of coproduced and collaborative community research. The project was designed to capture reflective data from communities throughout the project. However, whilst a good data set was captured, consistent data related to community experiences was more challenging to capture due to the circumstances and capacities of community members. For example, community-interviews and reflections were ended prematurely due to low-energy, capacities or illness of elderly community members, and surveys had a lower response rate than those of PEA surveys.

**AIM 3: To demonstrate the benefits of coproduction methods to the Greater Manchester Research & Design community, as a powerful way to align research to ethical principles and real-world societal needs, especially those of traditionally marginalised communities.**

Despite co-production receiving increased attention and adoption in academia, in STEM and digital Science as a methodological approach, it is still slow to be adopted. Therefore, a key aim of the project was to demonstrate the potential benefits of co-production to the wider Manchester Research community. Throughout the project PEA project progress and findings at numerous academic, policy and industry events and conferences. These were often to mixed audiences of academics, PhD students, businesses, industry professionals and impacted communities and well received and often led to further invitations to share findings from the project. An abbreviated summary of some of these appearances are as follows:

EVENT	LOCATION	DATE
3rd International Conference on Information Technology	India (online)	Mar-23
AI and the NHS	University of Oxford (online)	Jun-23
Centre for Digital Trust and Society Forum	University of Manchester	Jul-23
The Second International Adaptive and Sustainable Science, Engineering and Technology Conference	University of Manchester/ MMU	Jul-23
Responsible Tech Collective	Manchester	Jul-23
Public Affairs Conferences	Missouri State University	Sep-23
UKCI UK workshop on computational intelligence	Aston University	Sep-23
AI For West Yorkshire hosted by AI Tech UK	Leeds	Nov-23
Turing Network AI Ethics Forum	MMU	Jan-24
<u>Engagement@Manchester: Collaborative &amp; participatory approaches to research and engagement</u>	University of Manchester	Jan-23
4th International conference on Information Technology	Amity University, India (online)	Mar-24
MMU Doctoral Student Conference	MMU	Apr-24
UKRI Bridge AI Annual Showcase	Online	May-24
Public Engagement x Computer Science symposium	Online	Dec-24
AI & Disability Conference	Manchester	Feb-25
IEEE SSCI 2025 conference	Norway	Mar-25
IEEE CAI 2025 conference	USA	May-25

Professor Crockett's public advocacy of the project generated national interest, some of the most notable public engagements for the project included:

1) [AI in Government and Academia Summit 11th September 2025 o](#)

Organized by the Government Digital Service, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and MMU. Blog and photo on UK Gov website - Turning research into action at the AI in Government and Academia Summit – Government Digital and Data. See an update on the event here: [Turning research into action at the AI in Government and Academia Summit – Government Digital and Data](#)

2) [Cabinet Office Senior Leaders Visit Friday 19th September 2025](#)

A delegation of 20-30 senior Cabinet Office leaders (Permanent Secretaries and Directors General) attended a visit at MMU organised by Keeley Crockett and Darren Dancey. In attendance was Malcom Press.

PEAs in PODs was part of a presentation titled - People Powered AI: The impact of AI in local communities showcasing partners in our regional AI ecosystem.

PEAS in PODS – The Peoples Charter for AI was also showcased with explainer booklets at the AI in Society Lab visit.

Based on this event, the Centre for Digital Innovation ([home page - Centre for Digital Innovation](#)) were inspired to co-create an SME Charter for responsible AI which commences 25th November 2025. The charter will be co-created with community members that took part in the PEAS project.

3) [Liverpool City Region AI Summit - AI Summit | Liverpool City Region Combined Authority 23rd October 2025](#)

Professor Keeley Crockett took part in a panel on ethical and responsible AI at the event which was attended by over 1000 people: [AI Summit | Liverpool City Region Combined Authority](#), highlighting some of the project work from PEAS in PODS.

Social media was another domain to showcase the project’s progress and to engage the wider Higher Education sector with the findings from the PEA project and to promote coproduced research projects in the data science and STEM sectors. Posts about project outputs were significant moments of engagement with project findings. Below is a summary table of some of the key posts from Professor Keeley Crockett’s LinkedIn profile promoting different project activities:

POST OUTLINE	POST LINK	DATE	IMPRESSIONS	REACTIONS
Community Launch Event at Inspire for PEAS in PODS Video and Charter	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7271973942829932545">https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7271973942829932545</a>	09-Dec-24	1,291	43
10 principles of the Peoples Charter for AI	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7218610102604308481">https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7218610102604308481</a>	15-Jul-24	3,570	82
Promotion of Peoples Charter for Artificial Intelligence Explainer Booklet	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7220455996941312001/">https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7220455996941312001/</a>	20-Jul-24	4494	83
PEAS In PODS Case study booklet launch	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7381232046322532352">https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7381232046322532352</a>	07-Oct-25	2995	94
Alan Turing UK AI Fringe Event with community members	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7174322149887754240">https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7174322149887754240</a>	15-Mar-24	2125	61

The findings from the project have also been promoted through the publication of publicly accessible outputs such as podcasts and blog posts such as the Naimuri #datadonedifferently Podcast ([Let’s talk AI Assurance ft. Julia Ward and Keeley Crockett - #DataDoneDifferently | Podcast on Spotify](#)) or being featured on the Nexer blog (<https://www.nexerdigital.com/news-and-thoughts/responsible-tech-collective-learnings-and-possibilities/>) and across the projects website: [HOME - PEAs in Pods](#).

#### Academic Papers Published

1. K. Crockett, E. Colyer, L. Coulman, C. Nunn and S. Linn, "PEAs in PODs: Co-Production of Community Based Public Engagement for Data and AI Research," *2024 International Joint Conference on Neural Networks (IJCNN)*, Yokohama, Japan, 2024, pp. 1-10, doi: 10.1109/IJCNN60899.2024.10650039.

#### Grey Literature and Media

1. Humanising Trust in the Age of AI, (2024), Manchester Lit and Phil, Available: [Humanising Trust in the Age of AI - MCR Lit&Phil](#)
2. PEAs in Pods: Co-production of community-based engagement for data and AI research (2025), Available: [Social Responsibility | PEAs in Pods: Co-production of community-based engagement for data and AI research < Social Responsibility](#)

3. She Can Code Spotlight Series (2025), Available: [Spotlight Series: Keeley Crockett, IEEE member & Professor of Computational Intelligence, Manchester Metropolitan University - SheCanCode](#)

#### Publications in Draft

1. Participatory AI - Community led research as a mechanism to build trust the age of responsible AI, Keeley Crockett, Senior Fellow, IEEE, Caitlin Nunn, Sarah Linn, Lauren Coulman, Rochelle Taylor, Matt Ngozi Nnege, Matthew Thorpe, John Henry, Mushtahid Salam, Edwin Colyer. (Journal Article)

The impact of these publicly engaged outputs including talks, blogs, podcasts, panels and publications are not always easy to quantify. However, they have been well received with audiences and have often generated invitations to present or share insights from the project at related events.

The project outputs were well received a public, and community launches in July 2024, which included community members, and which demonstrated the possibilities of engaging Universities with community-engaged research. For example, 92% of respondents surveyed at the event agreed or strongly agreed that the resources created by the projects were essential and exciting. Whilst only 42% of respondents felt that they had learnt something new about artificial intelligence, 95% of respondents felt that they had learned something new about community engaged research. In addition, respondents felt that the event was ‘wonderful’, ‘educational and important’ and ‘inspiring’ with one declaring that ‘the project has been a success’. In addition, one of the key findings that emerged from attendees at the launch was the need to embed community engagement into future academic research and the clear positive impact of working with communities and the effect that this has on creating effective and impactful research outputs (Launch Event evaluation summary document July 2024). One attendee described the impact of the project findings and how there was a clear need to include community voices:

‘For me (the project’s impact) it was when we started talking about the... risks of AI...You can see how the principles and the things like that are quite helpful for businesses

companies to follow. But I think it's also easy for them to tick those as boxes. [What] is most powerful for me here is talking about the risks, the potential risks, to communities around exclusion and around being left behind. How do we get people - businesses, tech businesses to manage those risks from the beginning? And I think that is essential. How can they think about actively nourishing communities through AI? Coming from a commercial background, I know it's an afterthought. Like: Oh yeah, it will do all these nice things! But there is no critical thought.' (Vox pop interview, attendee at launch event, July 2024)

A PEA project event at the Turin Fringe Festival in March 2024 also provided insight into the interest in the wider Manchester HEI for collaborative and co-produced projects. The event, which included a panel of community members and PEAS generated strong interest from academics in wanting to understand how to centre co-production in their research. For example, attendees highlighted a desire to see **'more events related to community engagement'** particularly with 'community participants', a desire to be trained as a 'PEA' and 'more public engagement'. One participant found the project to be **'hugely helpful in the framing of (their) work going forward'** and another praised the **involvement of community** in the session. One participant wanted to explore AI technologies that were used within the PEA project (Turin Fringe Festival Evaluation Feedback, March 2024 drafted report).

The greatest impact on the Greater Manchester Research and Design community was evaluating the project's impact on the PEAs, as representatives of the GM research community. PEAs highlighted the impact on the project on their career trajectories and career interests:

"Being part of the project has opened doors for my future research and made me consider more strongly the role of public engagement and co-production in my future research." (PEA closing interview, March 2025)

"I had a chance to contribute to our present and future communities. New opportunities have been enabled for my research and others that I work with locally and internationally." (PEA closing interview, March 2025)

“Before (PEAS) I don’t think I would have done a project that has to do with people. But having been part of this, I think this this is what I want to do in future. Once I finish my PhD, I will continue to work in this area because I have found I found it fulfilling....the project really grew my confidence...being part of this has opened my eyes to understand that I can do (research and teaching) side by side because it has given me such a joy talking to communities”. (PEA closing interview January 2025)

Whilst there was a clear impact on PEAs, they described a mid to low departmental interest in publicly engaged and coproduced research, with only 55% of PEAS agreeing or strongly agreeing that their department or industry advocated for community engaged research. In anonymous surveys, PEAs expressed doubt that their departments would independently advocate for publicly engaged research and that positions, such as Professor Crockett’s, as a public-engagement champion, were essential to driving STEM and data science departments towards community-minded research. However, **over 85% agreed or strongly agreed that the project had made them confident to advocate within their industry or department for community engaged research principals to be integrated into research projects and 100% agreed or strongly agreed that community engaged research is the future of AI and data science.** PEAs and community members also both expressed a need to circulate the public-outputs to demonstrate the benefits and necessity of community engaged research. This has now been achieved with the launch of the training program, AI Ethics in a box and the community roadmap on the PEAS in PODS website.

**AIM 4: To nurture sustained relationships between PEAs, research institutions and traditionally marginalised communities and embed such interactions into institutional research processes.**

As the project has drawn to a close both PEAS and community members have enquired about the possibilities of what might be next for the project outputs, relationships and findings. There is a clear sense of ownership between PEAS and community members regarding the project outputs and both have expressed a desire to understand the impact of the outputs and to ensure they reach a

wider audience. All project outputs are showcased on the PEAS in PODS website and in addition on the AI ethics in a box framework.

Surveys at the close of project fieldwork revealed a development of relationships between PEAS and community members and a desire to see relationships and networks continue. For example, a community survey revealed that 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to be involved in projects and opportunities like this in the future and 100% strongly agreed that being part of the project increased their understanding of, and exposure to, Universities in Manchester (PEA Community Survey, July 2024).

Being part of a university project was a clear draw for participation of communities, with many highlighting the opportunity to work with the University as a decision maker for their involvement and this should be capitalised on by the University, with potential barriers to ongoing inclusion addressed. Community members have continued to express an interest in continued involvement in research projects with the University, and with Noisy Cricket, and have actively participated when these opportunities have emerged. For example, community members from the PEAS in PODs project have since been involved in two participatory AI PhD projects in the Department of Computation Sciences at MMU. This includes participating in one of the PEA's PhD projects on accessible AI and being involved in workshops on *AI in Everyday Life: Who's Really in Control?* For another MMU based PhD project (See more information here:

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7369418330790600705/>)

In addition, related to the Cabinet Office Senior Leaders visit in September 2025, the Centre for Digital Innovation at MMU were inspired to co-create an SME Charter for responsible AI which commences 25th November 2025. The charter will be co-created with community members that took part in the PEAS project, further deepening the relationships between the PEA project community members and the University.

At the close of the project most PEAs expressed an interest in continuing to pursue community engaged research, with some explaining that they had already sought to include public engagement principals into their work:

“I have now built PE (public engagement) into funding calls, with an appreciation of the time it takes! This is not something I would've readily done before the training and PEAS project.”  
[PEA, Closing Interview, November 2024]

For example, one PEA expressed the learnings from the project and understanding the importance of involving marginalised voices:

‘We’ve got to practice what we preach, get out there and work with people. You can’t just sit as a commentator on these things all the time. So (by being involved in the PEAS project) I feel like I have made that step towards doing that in terms of my own research’ (PEA Closing interview, May 2025)

Survey’s with PEAs indicated that 100% of PEAs strongly agreed that working with communities was an enriching and valuable experience and over 75% of PEAs agreed or strongly agreed that they had built networks with the community (PEA Survey July 2024).

CLOSE

This document was drafted as a report for the EPSRC and as of November 2025 is not meant for further distribution until further notice. If you have any queries related to the content of this document, please contact Professor Keeley Crockett [k.crockett@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:k.crockett@mmu.ac.uk)



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