



SCIENCE OUTREACH PROJECT

Public Understanding of Science— Communication Skills for Researchers

Issue 3 - April 2011



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Welcome

Welcome to the third issue of the Science Outreach Project newsletter. Year 5 of the project is now well underway, and is our biggest year yet!

In this issue, you will find reports on recruitment and training, feedback from our master class in December, details of all our events for the Spring and Summer and an update on our efforts for find more funding. As always, we've also got an update from one of our project alumni.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter. If you have any suggestions for future issues, please let us know.

2011 Recruitment

Given that this is the last year of our current funding, the Steering Group decided to expand the project to accommodate up to 60 researchers over two training sessions this year. Emails were sent to our partner schools and the response was overwhelming. Nearly 120 people requested places before we were able to get the word out that the courses were full. Clearly there is still plenty of interest in the project!

Training 2011

This year we ran two training sessions on 11/18 January and 26 January/2 February. Places were offered to 63 researchers, and 58 completed the training. The format was similar to last year and included input from Widening Participation, the Safety Office, Sam Tang (Chemistry) and several participants from previous years. External contributions came from Benia Kuczynska, a teacher at one of our partner schools, Janice Yelland-Sutcliffe, from JAYS Education Consultancy and Jonathan Longfellow, Director of Mad Science East Midlands.

As in previous years, the feedback from the training was overwhelmingly positive, with everyone agreeing that it was valuable and they would recommend it to colleagues. One researcher commented, "The training course made a really fun change to my day to day lab work. All of the staff and organisers were really helpful, supportive and informative. I'm really looking forward to seeing what opportunities are open to me after getting involved in this project!"



Winter Master Class

In December, Chris Tan and Andy Leidenroth from Biology delivered our first winter master class. With some extra help from steering group member and biology researcher Jess Tyson, the pair ran a day-long session on molecular biology research for 30 A-level biology students from Arnold Hill School. The practical work focused on PCR and gel electrophoresis, both in the A-level syllabus but difficult to do in schools. The day also included a research lab tour and a talk from Dr. Matt Loose.

The event was a big success, with great feedback from students and teachers alike. According to one teacher it was "an excellent day. Interactive throughout and a great opportunity for the students to use techniques and equipment not normally available to them."

Spring and Summer Outreach Events

This year's outreach programme is set to be our busiest yet. As usual, we held our NSEW Science Circus event in March at QMC. The event hosted 50 students and their teachers from three different schools. It also provided a great opportunity for our new researchers to try out their activities before the classroom visits.

Classroom visits began on 28 March, with a visit to an AS Chemistry class at Becket School. The researchers were really well received, with the teacher telling us that several students at last year's event had since decided to study chemistry at University with a view to going into research! We have a total of 18 classroom visits scheduled for this spring and summer, most of which are due to take place before Easter. For a full list of these, please check out the website: www.nottingham.ac.uk/sop.

As in previous years, we're also working on plans for a couple of master classes. We've been asked to help with two events in June—one with the Environmental Sciences Department and one with the Faculty of Engineering. These will provide opportunities for our researchers to develop more intensive sessions and to get involved with the planning of the event. If there is interest from the researchers, more events could still be scheduled.

Impact

Following last year's successful evaluation of impact for researchers, we're going to be looking in more depth at the impacts of the Science Outreach Project for schools. A new impact questionnaire will be sent to teachers this month asking them about any effects our events have had on their teaching or the outcomes for their students. We've always received good feedback, and informal discussions indicate that our interventions encouraged some students to continue studying science or aspire to research careers. We'll also be sending the researcher impact questionnaire to last year's participants to gauge what impacts the project has had for them.



The Future of the Science Outreach Project

The Science Outreach Project is currently in its final year of Robert's Money funding. The future of the project after this year is still uncertain. However, the project coordinator and steering group have been working hard to find other sources of funding for the future. This has included discussions with Research Innovation Services, the Development Office, Widening Participation, and the Graduate School; an Annual Fund Grant application and Wellcome Trust funding application (unfortunately not successful), and talks with postgraduate tutors and heads of school in participating departments.

We're doing all we can to ensure this successful project can continue, but would welcome any suggestions others may have for potential funding sources. Please get in touch if you have any ideas. In the sad event that this does turn out to be our final newsletter, I'd like to take this opportunity to say Thank You for your support over the years! We've made a real difference for many researchers, teachers and school students.

Where are they now?

In this third newsletter, we are featuring Pamela Styles. Pamela studied for her PhD in Genetics in the School of Biology. She joined the Science Outreach Project in 2008 and went on to help with extra school visits, master classes, training sessions and community events. She showed a fantastic flair for creating engaging activities to demonstrate complex topics. After finishing her PhD, Pamela worked as a school tutor and then joined the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust as a Warden. She is now working as an Education Assistant at Blackpool Zoo.



Pamela said, "The training and experience I received in the outreach project was incredibly useful. The project helped me to develop skills of session planning and communicating challenging concepts to young people, and a lot more confidence, which I have since used and developed through education volunteering and public lecturing. The project was my first experience of teaching/public engagement and inspired me to gain a lot more experience in this field and ultimately to pursue a career in this direction."



Steering Group Details

The Science Outreach Project is mainly run by the project coordinator, but guidance and the overarching direction for the project are provided by the steering group. The steering group meets at least three times per year and includes representatives from each school or department in the project, the Graduate School and Widening Participation. We are currently looking for a new Engineering staff representative, so if you know any good candidates, please let us know.

- Prof David Archer – Steering Group Chair, Biology
- Pam Kerr – Project finance, Biology
- Dr Jess Tyson – Biology
- Rohanna Dow – Biology
- Dr Jane Grove – Centre for Biomolecular Sciences
- Prof Greg Tucker – Biosciences, Graduate School
- Emily Boothroyd – Biosciences
- Dr Sam Tang – Chemistry
- Eric Masika – Chemistry
- Dr Lisa White – Pharmacy
- Jennie Lord – Pharmacy
- Prof Penny Gowland – Physics
- Ian Kimpton – Physics and Astronomy
- Lukasz Bonenberg – Engineering
- David Woolley – Widening Participation
- Dr Rachael Pearson – Graduate School
- Sarah Pierce – Project coordinator

Contact us

If you'd like more information, or have any comments or suggestions, please get in touch!

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