

Strategy Recommendations from the Science Communication Conference, 23-24 May 2005

The yearly Science Communication Conference provides an opportunity for those interested in the communication, direction, and governance of science to share experiences and learn about the latest developments. The conference is attended by a diverse range of professionals from a variety of backgrounds, however all share a common interest in the direction and development of a field commonly known as 'science communication'.

After the 2004 conference 6 strategy recommendations were developed. They are intended to give those connected to the field of science communication a common goal, a sense of shared ownership and responsibility over the direction of the field and an opportunity to work together to address strategic issues.

The recommendations are aimed at the government, the scientific community, the science communication community and others to avoid a state of inertia over public support for science engineering and technology and the risk that in 10 years time no progress would have been made.

The 2005 conference drew out two new strategy recommendations for focus over the coming year as well as developing the six recommendations from the 2004 conference. The basis of these recommendations were developed at the conference; however it is acknowledged that there are many individuals and organisations with a stake in the recommendations that were unable to attend the conference. With this in mind these recommendations will remain open for comment over the coming months to enable anyone with an interest to input their suggestions.

As the organisers of the Conference the BA and the Royal Society will take a lead in developing actions from these strategies and forming working groups to take these actions forward. Anyone interested in developing the recommendations should contact nick.hillier@the-ba.net.

2005 new strategy recommendations

Share good practice

The conference agreed that we need a greater clarity of purpose. This could be achieved by capturing and sharing case studies, both successful and less so. In particular those working in the field need to develop a shared vocabulary about engagement and its impacts. This can only be achieved by working closely with the wider dialogue community and social scientists. The community should make links to discuss ways of communicating and sharing knowledge by means of web sites, meetings, workshops, training sessions.

Engage with industry

Science communicators must embrace a wider perspective so that industry is not seen as a separate world in order to forge links with industry bodies. We must consider the industry position regarding communication and the interests of its stakeholders and make efforts to accommodate this. In order to achieve this we should form strategic partnerships with PR bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations or the Science Engineering and Technology Group in order to ask industry representatives how we can engage better, identify barriers and address them.

2004 strategy recommendations development (2005 additions in *italic*)

Reward and Recognition

Take steps to reward scientists *and HEIs* (in sufficiently large numbers) for engaging with the public.

Providing sufficient funds for engagement

Provide funds for activities on a large scale, with diverse groups from all backgrounds and at all levels, including more opportunities for adults.

Funding bodies to set the lead by embedding change within their own organisations and should report on the impacts of this, especially to higher education institutes. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Wellcome Trust and the Research Councils should cooperate on a joint strategy for rewarding and recognising the engagement work of institutes and departments, as well as of individuals. An expanded grant scheme offering more bursaries for postgraduate studies in science communication should be funded.

Science communicators must explore real costs of engagement, before requesting funding, establish a clearer picture of how much is really required and what it will achieve. Undertake (and share) full cost analyses of projects.

Recognise the value of the contributions of the public and other non scientists to policy making

Adopting good practice in engaging with the public; learning through the sharing of good practice from diverse field. *Explore means of building bridges, e.g. between science communication networks and policy-makers, so the public can see its influence feeding through to the decision-makers. Equip people for dissent as well as for agreement. Engage the public earlier in the process.*

Training scientists

Work with academia and industry to ensure those emerging from undergraduate and postgraduate studies are equipped to play leadership roles, to be good communicators *and explore the ethics of their work. Explore the possibility of offering training to help new graduates and post-graduates form and articulate ideas about the ethics of their work. Monitor those emerging from undergraduate and post-graduate studies to see effects on their skills.*

Collaboration between the science and social science community

Bring the science and social science communities together to agree on the principles of engagement and their implementation as well as other issues like the involvement of the media and uncertainty in science, and their training implications. *Carry on building cross-disciplinary communication channels between the science, social science and dialogue communities. At the conference, Ian Diamond highlighted that now is the time to get linked into the Science in Society research as many of the projects are due to report back. A series of seminars exploring the ESRC SIS research projects are planned for later in the year.*

Working with the media

Development new and creative ways of working with the broadcast media to reach and interact with the public at large. *Continue with discussions with the broadcast media in particular, for example the BBC and Channel 4, and explore new avenues where possible.*