

**Science Communication Conference
22 & 23 June 2009**

The Evaluation and Assessment Team, Wellcome Trust

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Summary

- A total of 375 persons attending the conference were invited to provide feedback on the event and 252 attendees responded, giving a 67% response.
- Overall, respondents were satisfied with the organisation of the conference (91%), and 91% also felt that the conference had either met or exceeded their expectations.
- A majority felt that there had been enough time for networking (86%) and that the programme had been well structured (82%).
- Most respondents thought that the conference had been inclusive, ensuring attendees felt welcome to make comments (83%) and giving audiences enough time for discussion (61%).
- Almost all respondents were satisfied with the venue (95%) but a large proportion (45%) were not satisfied with the catering - as they felt there had not been enough food and that the format of the lunches had not worked.
- 95% felt that basing the conference programme on calls for proposals was a good idea and should be used in the future, however, 61% had no opinion about the opportunity to submit a proposal this year.
- The opportunity to network was the most mentioned benefit of the conference (48% of those providing comments said so). Respondents appreciated both the structured networking and the informal opportunities to meet others at the conference and at the dinner. In fact, 76% of respondents stated that their main reason for attending the conference was to network.
- Other main benefits of the conference included particular breakout session and/or plenary sessions. Those most mentioned by respondents were the new media sessions (n=13) and Jonathon Porritt's keynote speech (n=12).
- About three quarters of respondents suggested improvements or changes to future conferences. The most mentioned suggestions were: *change lunch format* (n=40), *ensure speakers do not overrun and guarantee enough time for questions* (n=24). Some respondents also suggested changes to the format of the sessions (n=22) and the focus of the sessions (n=22).
- Respondents attending the conference dinner at the Wellcome Trust were particularly happy with the networking opportunities (76%) and most liked the buffet style dinner (61%) although some said that they would have liked more chairs in the venue. About half of respondents were satisfied with the opportunity to see highlighted awards (56%), but some felt the signposting could have been clearer.

Introduction

The 2009 Science Communication Conference was held at King's Place in London on 22 and 23 June and was organised by the British Science Association in partnership with the Wellcome Trust. After the event, an online survey was sent out to delegates and speakers asking them to feedback on the conference (n=380)¹. The survey was online and open for two and a half weeks with two reminders being sent out. A total of 375 conference attendees

¹ 305 were delegates and 75 speakers

received the email inviting them to take part in the survey, 252² responded, giving a 67% response.

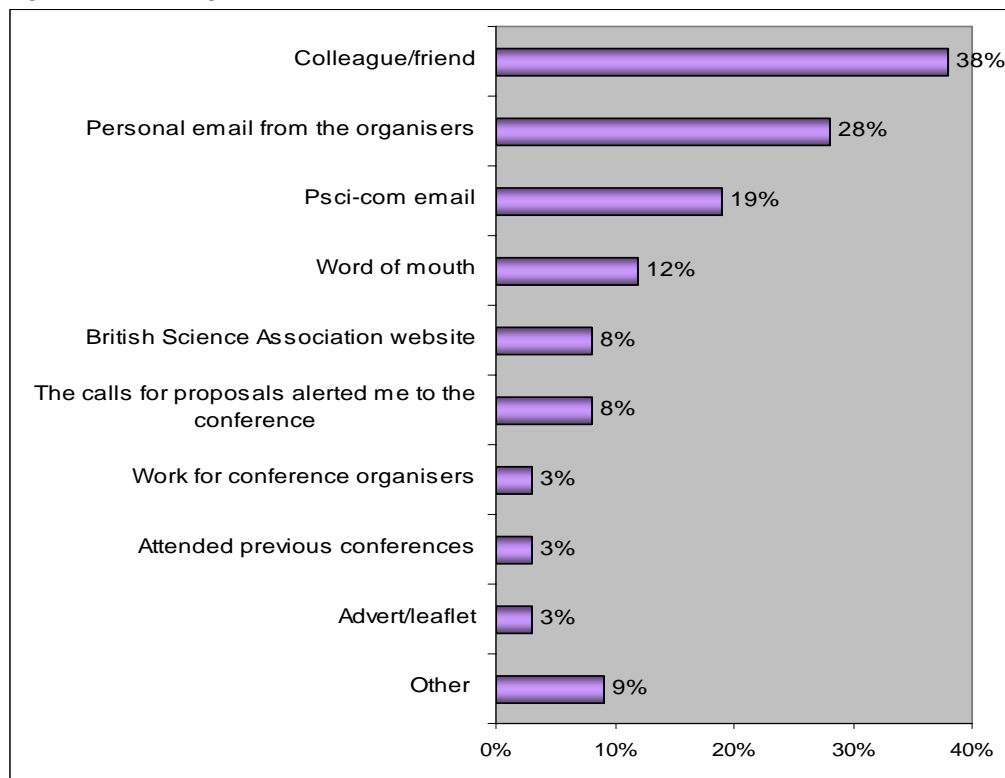
[It should be noted that all percentages in this report are rounded and may not add up to a hundred.]

1. Pre-Conference

1.1. Hearing about the conference

Around two thirds of respondents found out about the conference through a colleague/friend (38%) or via an email from the organisers (28%).

Figure 1: Finding out about the conference



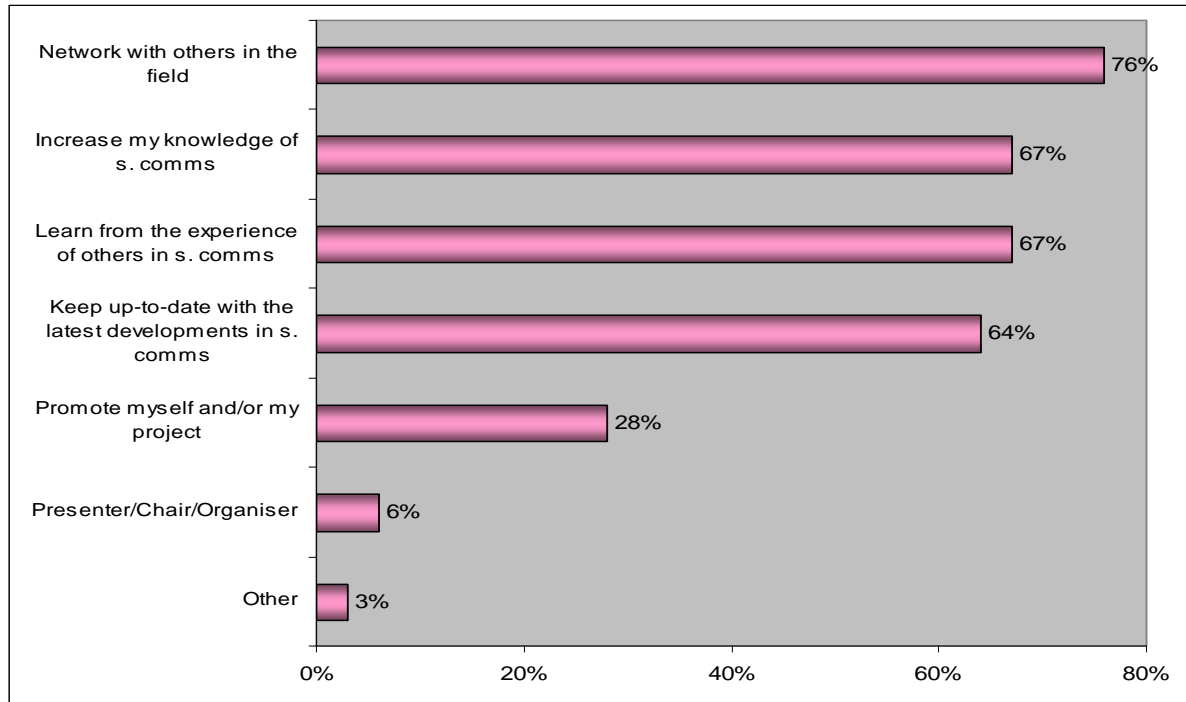
Base: All respondents (n=252)

1.2. Reasons for attending

About three quarters of respondents attended the conference to network (76%), while 67% hoped to increase their knowledge about science communication and learn from others. Many also hoped to conference would ensure that they were keep-up-to date with the latest developments (64%).

² 211 were delegates and 41 speakers

Figure 2: Reasons for attending the conference

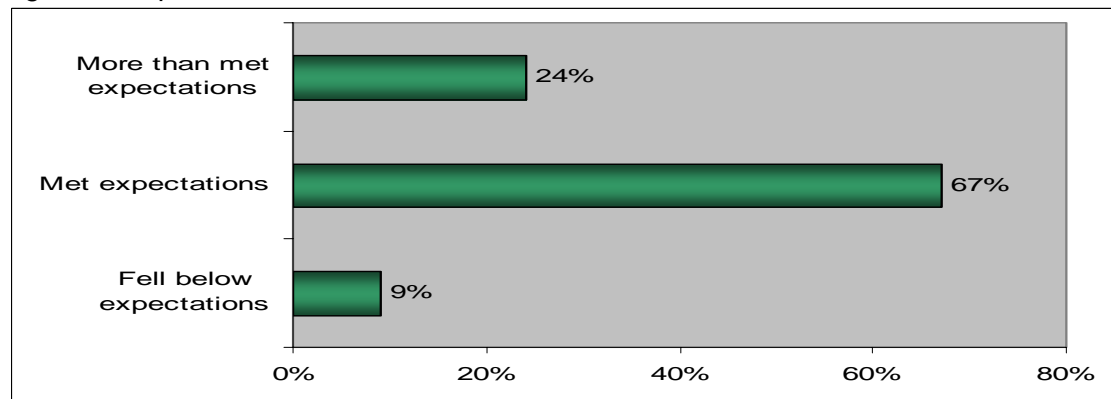


Base: All respondents (n=252)

2. The conference

The vast majority of respondents felt that the conference had met or more than met their expectations (91%).

Figure 3: Expectations of conference



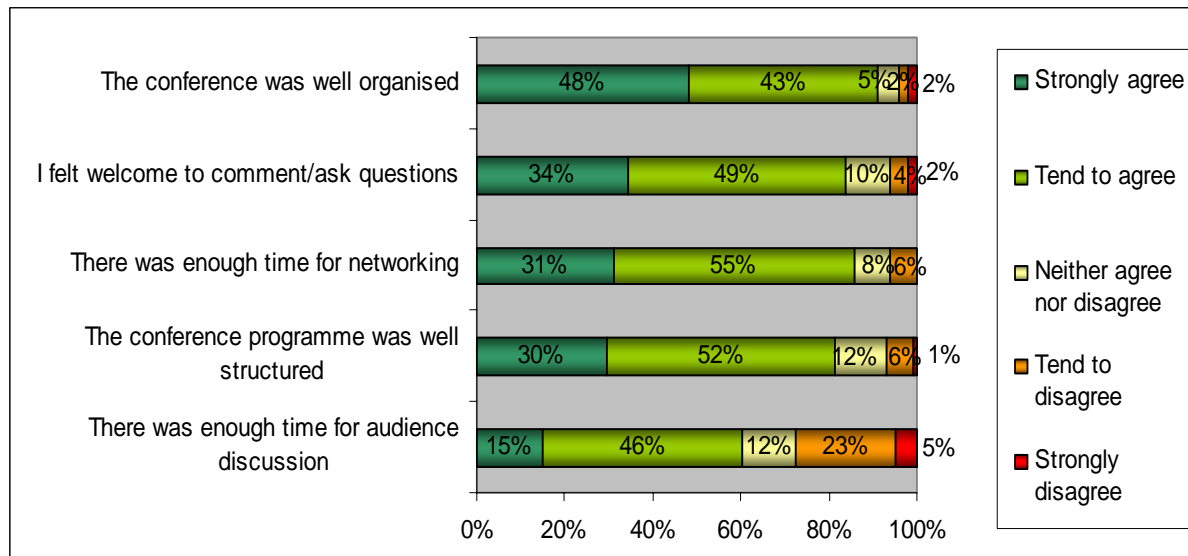
Base: All respondents (n=252)

A few respondents (n=22) felt that the conference had fallen below their expectations. The most mentioned reasons for this were that they felt they had learnt nothing new (n=6) and that the audience was not included enough (n=4).

2.1 Conference organisation and structure

Over 80% felt that that the conference had been well organised, that there had been enough time for questions and networking and that the two days had been well structured. Around 60% also felt that there had been enough time for discussion.

Figure 4: Rating the organisation and structure of the conference



Base: All respondents (n=252) Not shown: N/A

Almost a third of respondents explained their ratings more in detail (n=79), some to say that the conference was generally well organised (n=16) and that they enjoyed the structured networking and/or there should have been more (n=18). However, some attendees also pointed out issues they felt had not worked so well during the conference:

- grouping questions together meant not all were answered (n=17),
- speakers overran their time slot (n=15),
- audience did not have enough opportunity to participate (n=11),
- venue was unsuitable and/or over-crowded rooms (n=10),
- session clashes (n=9), and
- quantity and/or quality of food at the venue was poor (n=7).

Comments explaining the ratings included:

“I thought the opportunities to network were excellent, particularly the structured session on the first day.”

“The technique of taking multiple questions/comments together before allowing speakers to respond was frustrating as it meant that some questions didn’t get answered.”

“In most panel sessions, the discussion was more useful than the speakers, but the speakers inevitably over-ran, limiting time for discussion.”

“This was the best conference I have ever attended.”

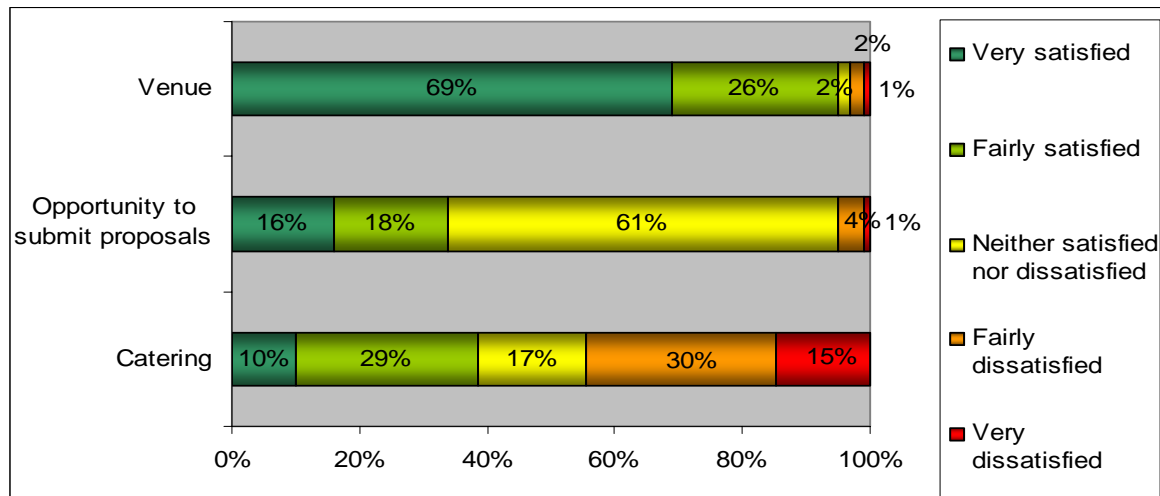
2.2 Venue and catering

A majority of respondents were satisfied with the venue (95%) while attendees were less satisfied with the catering (with nearly half - 45% stating they were not satisfied). The format of the lunches and the lack of food appeared to have been the main reasons for discontent.

Most respondents had no particular opinion around the opportunity to submit a proposal (61%), but 95% thought that the same approach should be used for next year’s conference.

Respondents were also asked if they knew that the Wellcome Trust was one of the organisers of the conference this year; nearly all (94%) confirmed that they were aware of this.

Figure 5: Conference logistics ratings



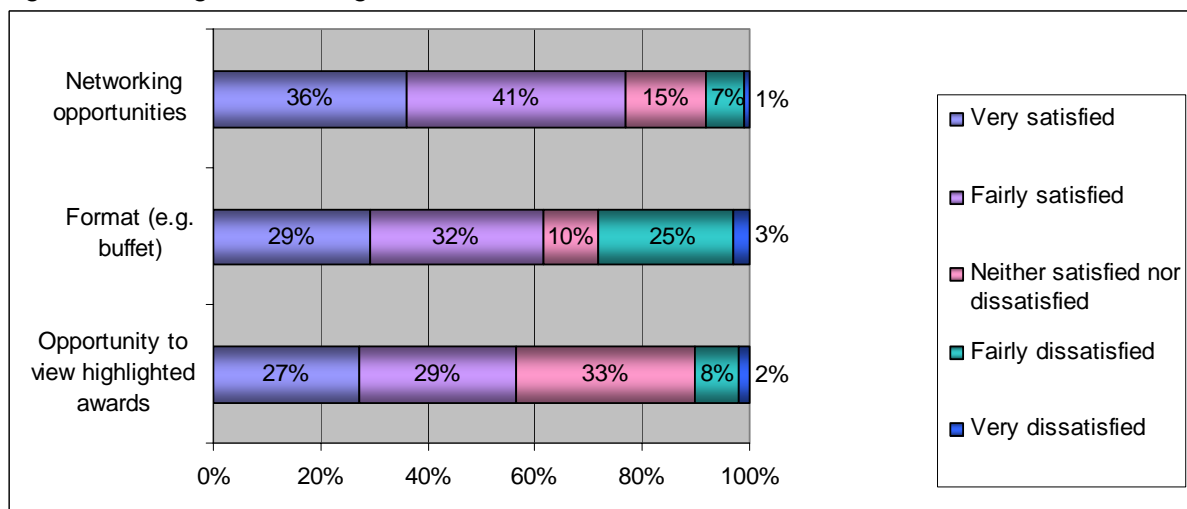
Base: All respondents (n=252)

2.3. Conference dinner and evening event

One optional feature for conference delegates, was the conference dinner on day one. The informal dinner was held at the Wellcome Trust’s facilities and the evening included performances, debates, films and online interactive games and a chance to see some of the public engagement projects funded by the Trust. Thirty-eight percent of all conference attendees were expected to attend the conference dinner (n=147) while 96 respondents to the survey attended the conference dinner (38%).

Levels of satisfaction with the evening event were high; around three quarters of respondents attending the conference dinner were satisfied with the networking opportunities and nearly two-thirds (61%) were happy with the format of the dinner. Over half of the respondents also stated that they were satisfied with the chance to see highlighted awards (56%).

Figure 6: Rating the evening event



Base: Those attending the dinner (n=96)

Half of those attending the conference dinner gave additional comments about the event (n=48), some to say that they had very much enjoyed the evening and liked the format (n=15), while others would have liked there to be more chairs to sit on (n=14), and a few respondents would have preferred a more formal sit-down dinner (n=8). Some stated that they felt the events of the evening had been spread out in too many rooms (n=6) and a few respondents were not sure if they had seen the highlighted awards (n=5).

Comments included:

“Format worked well leaving delegates to direct their own activity at the conference dinner.”

“There was nowhere to sit down to eat dinner – this is usually OK but we’d been standing and eating all day at the conference too!”

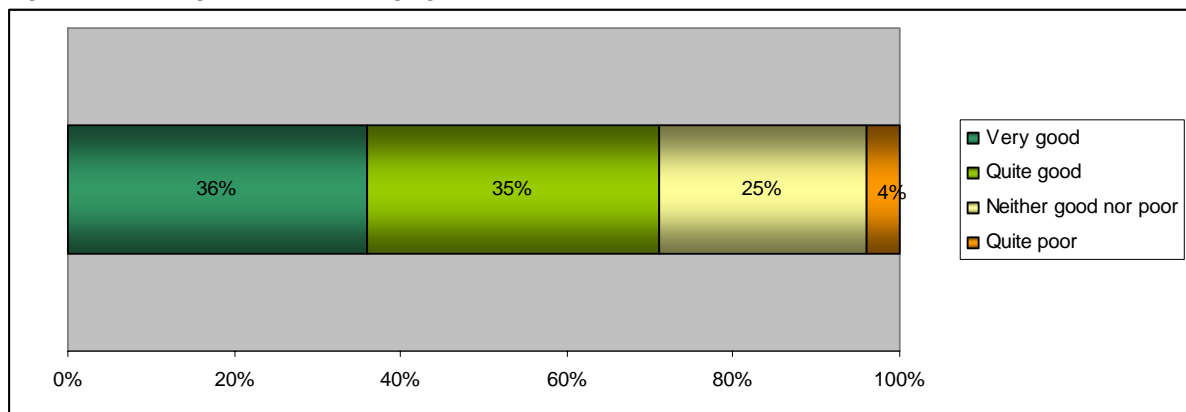
“I was expecting a more formal dinner for the price but was pleasantly surprised to find there were projects to take part in. Perhaps the food should be optional for this evening event since more people would be inclined to attend if the price was lower and the format was more clearly explained in advance.”

2.4. Public engagement breakout session

At this year’s conference, a new session was piloted for those who were new to public engagement and organisers were therefore especially keen to hear from attendees to this session.

In total, 55 respondents indicated that they had attended this session (22% of all respondents) and 71% felt the session was very or quite good.

Figure 7: Rating the Public Engagement session



Base: Those attending the Public Engagement session (n=55)

3. Main benefits and suggested improvements

3.1 Most useful parts of the conference

Attendees were asked to identify the most useful part of the conference and 89% (n=225) of respondents gave comments.

Just as last year, the opportunity to network (formally and informally) was the most mentioned benefit, with 48% of respondents referencing this (n=108).

“The chance to meet other delegates – the conference was set up to make this easy and the ice-breaker was successful.”

Twenty-one percent of respondents felt that some of the breakout sessions had been most useful (n=48). The most mentioned sessions that respondents had enjoyed were the new media sessions (n=13).

Twenty percent of respondents mentioned the plenary sessions and/or the keynote speeches as the most useful parts of the conference (n=44), Jonathon Porritt’s speech received a special mention by twelve respondents and Change for Life by eight.

“Jonathon Porritt was awesome if depressing. But it’s good to have someone like him who points out that science communication is quite important in some instances. A rallying cry!”

“I particularly liked the non-plenary sessions, which very much involved attendees taking part, participating - not just listening to others.”

“As someone who hasn’t been to this Conference before, all plenary sessions were of particular interest to me, learning from speaker’s advices and experience. It was a surprise to realise the wide range of roles that can be done in the area of Science Communication and I appreciated to meet professionals whom with I share interests and excitement.”

Some respondents also appreciated the chance to share information and learn from others (12%, n=27).

“I very much welcomed the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others both through networking and the talks. It was also refreshing to be reminded that you are part of something bigger, as I find it’s sometimes easy to feel like you are a lone voice on the topic of science communication.”

3.2 Suggested improvement and/or changes

Around three quarters of participants chose to make comments around improvements and potential changes for the future (n=188).

Respondents chose to make comments on a variety of topics, comments relating to the most mentioned themes are outlined below:

- **The catering** – not enough food and format did not work (n=40).

“The lunchtime catering was a bit sparse, which meant that people lunched outside the conference reducing networking opportunities.”

“The food was slightly disappointing due to small portions and having to chase waiters.”

- **Timings** – Some sessions were too short, not enough time for discussions, speakers overran their time, lunch breaks were too long (n=24).

“Reduce length of lunch and tea breaks. Have more time for discussion within sessions.”

- **Format of the sessions** – Suggestions included more practical sessions; shorter presentations and more time for discussions; smaller groups in the breakout sessions; and less speakers per session (n=24).

“I would run fewer but longer sessions to allow topics to be dealt with in greater detail.”

- **Focus of the sessions** – Some felt that the focus was too narrow, looking at case studies rather than drawing out the general learning points, others wanted more focus on evaluation or a more academic focus (n=22).

“Too many speakers extolled the virtue of their pet projects, rather than summarising them and drawing out key lessons.”

- **Other topics for inclusion**– Respondents suggested a variety of other topics that could have been included such as *sessions on skills development, emerging issues in science communication* and *science communication in charities* (n=22).

“I would have really liked to see a session where people got to highlight new and upcoming projects that they would like others to know about/get involved in/help with. Perhaps including an ‘offer and asks’ forum where people can showcase new resources or models that they think others might like to work on or can ask for assistance in finding scientists to participate in a project or volunteers to help out at events etc.”

A further 18 respondents simply said that there was nothing that needed to change or improve.

3.3 Additional comments

A number of respondents (n=97) choose to make additional comments, most commenting positively on the event. All comments were around issues raised previously in the report. A selection of comments are included below:

“Huge congrats for the step-change in tone, content and organisation this year. So much better than last year - if the same improvement continues next year, you'll be on to a winner.”

“I was personally really disappointed - there were a number of individuals and projects that the conference seemed to centre around and I felt this excluded many people (...) There were a lack of general lessons that could be taken away from the plenary sessions in particular i.e. the project funded by £75 m. Many of us struggle to get a budget of £75 so there was very little to take away from this session.”

“Thank you very much for a well organised conference, some great speakers, and a range of interesting sessions. I have taken a lot back to my institution, have disseminated the key points, and will be working on embedding public engagement more strongly with the advice and insight gained from the conference.”

“I have not been to that conference for 10 years and it was really nice to meet so many new people. Thank you to all the people who did the workshops (...) Their presentations were all very interesting and useful. The morning speakers were especially good. I really hated that glossy programme though! I take it personally as it

is hard work to find the funds to go to your conference so I really don't like you spending money on silly gloss."

"I was really let-down by this year's conference. The organisers need to remember that the attendees are a room full of experts in this area. We need time to talk and to challenge ideas, not be talked-at, and we need to hear about and discuss new ideas that will help us develop our practice, not listen to description of age-old project formats and ideas. And please don't let Wellcome take control of so much of the agenda again. It was depressing to hear about the ways in which they chuck so much money away while the rest of the industry faces its toughest times for more than a decade."

"The venue was lovely but the space where refreshments were served was rather cramped. The food was good but the way lunch was served was a shambles; you didn't know what was coming or from where, and there simply wasn't enough. It was a real shame."

"I actually did not know about the call for proposals which was used to put together the conference programme. I would be very interested in this for next year so I could submit."

"This year's event was much, much better than previous years (having attended the last 5). I think it was possibly due to the call for proposals? In any case, well done to the team."

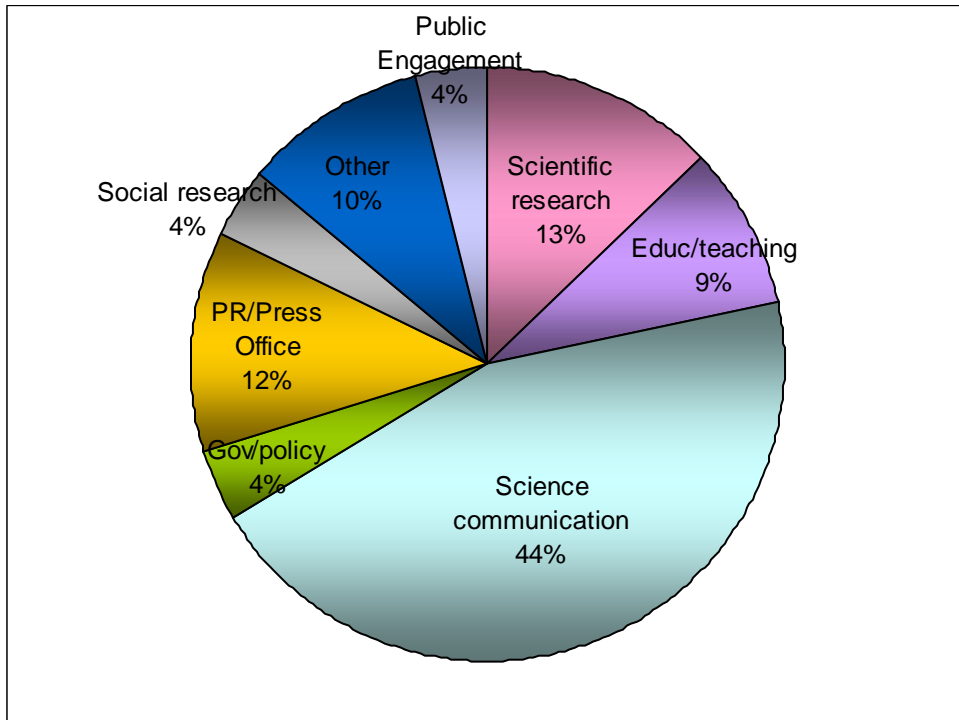
"As a session organiser, I feel that I should have been contacted directly about the use of Twitter in sessions. The presenters as well were unaware of this aspect and some were presenting information that they had gotten permission to name groups etc - but only if it remained in the session, With out realising Twitter was being used, this meant that presentations were being made without appropriate permission being given (...)."

"This has been one of the most thought-provoking Conferences I have ever attended (in general), maybe because I am relatively new to this field compared to my own research field). I had the opportunity to learn a lot from example of good practice and professional sci communicators. Everyone was kind and open to talk about their experiences during the networking time available. The speakers were all well-informed, resourceful and top-level, 'they know their stuff'. It was well organised, superb venue (well connected and lots of natural light)."

4. About you

The majority of respondents were delegates (n=211), while 41 were speakers. The largest proportion of respondents worked in science communication (44%).

Figure 8: Respondents main areas of work



Base: All respondents (n=252)