

Press Release

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Scientific community and Government must work smarter at engaging with the public

Science-based organisations and Government need to make greater efforts to engage the public with the sciences, according to a new report 'Science for All' published today as part of the UK Science and Society strategy commissioned by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS).

'Science for All', identifies an urgent need to build on approaches developed in recent years for engaging the public with science in new and fresh ways. It lays out a roadmap for all science-based organisations, government and other interested groups, to commit to take action. The report, commissioned by BIS from an expert group, draws on the Government's previous consultation, and on seven pieces of wider research.

Roland Jackson, Chief Executive of the British Science Association, who chaired the expert group said:

"In our report we make explicit the different purposes and reasons for public engagement and set out a detailed action plan for increasing its effectiveness

Widely shared ownership of the action plan is essential, since so many different organisations and people are involved in public engagement, for so many different reasons. We are therefore seeking to develop an open process for developing and implementing our recommended actions. We will be exploring ideas for this over coming weeks and welcome suggestions and offers to participate and contribute."

The report and action plan contains around 60 actions and proposed actions. It is hoped that societal groups will work in partnership with government, funders, employers and science communication organisations to deliver this action plan. Actions include:

- Ensure all public funders of the sciences have mechanisms in place to support and recognise public engagement
- All Government R&D contracts to the private sector to require delivery of an appropriate plan for public engagement
- Develop a competency framework for public engagement, and explore how these competencies might be embedded into existing or developing professional development frameworks
- All scientific research papers with any public interest dimension to have a plain English summary giving context and implications, for public and media consumption
- Set up a pilot 'public compact', to enable concerted action on national issues by government, public sector bodies, businesses and members of the public
- DCMS and publicly-funded cultural institutions to demonstrate commitment to recognising science as a part of our culture
- Explore and promote the role of social media as a mechanism for engagement with the sciences

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Note to editors

(1) Report title: Science for All':

<http://www.britishscienceassociation.org/scienceforall>
<http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/scienceandsociety/site/all/>

(2) The report focuses on three key challenges identified by the Group:

First, public engagement is still a relatively new and emerging field, and our understanding of many aspects is only now developing. We therefore felt that a vital focus should be:

- A wider understanding of why, when and how the public engages with the sciences

Second, although there are many organisations and individuals working in this area, and much parallel activity in different sectors, we discovered that there was a significant lack of joined-up working and sharing between those who are involved. We identified a further challenge therefore to develop:

- Supportive networks and mechanisms for increasing effective engagement

Third, although there is now compelling evidence of the vital role public engagement plays in sustaining a healthy culture for science, there are still significant barriers to individuals who wish to embrace engagement because of institutional cultures which marginalise or undervalue engagement. Our third challenge therefore is to work towards:

- A professional culture that values, recognises and supports public engagement with the sciences