

Comments from Organisers in response to National Science & Engineering Week 2010

Thank you for sending back your evaluation forms. We use your evaluation to produce a report on the success of National Science and Engineering Week (please go to www.nsew.org.uk to see the full evaluation report). This report is presented to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and is important in securing funding for National Science and Engineering Week 2011.

Below are the comments and complaints we received from National Science and Engineering Week organisers this year. We are grateful for your feedback. We listen to your comments and aim to answer and respond to all your concerns. Our responses to the comments may be useful for all organisers, so we have produced this response sheet.

Resources

"More short quizzes to suit different age groups - online and printable versions."

"More ideas for simple events like the quiz that everyone can take part in."

"Even more online stuff/suggestions to give a wow factor for less interested pupils"

- We produce three activity packs each year (primary and secondary schools) along with a quiz and two mass participation online activities. Each of these are curriculum-linked and can be done as part of the CREST Awards. We also offer activity packs from previous years, including "60-Second Science", which contains short experiments that can be achieved quickly in class with maximum effect. For 2011 we will look into providing more easy-to-access activities.

"Please make resource packs more relevant to different age groups"

"I would like to see more games/information suitable for foundation stage children and KS1 on the website."

- We are looking into this for 2011. This year we partnered with Fifi and the Flowertots to provide a range of resources aimed at under-5's which were in-line with our 'Earth' theme. For next year we are looking at offering resources for this age-group again, in addition to putting together an activity pack specifically for SEN pupils.

"Would like lots of small investigations next year as well as large-scale projects like 'What on Earth' activities."

- The "60-Second Science" Activity Pack, in addition to "Science on a Shoestring" provide a range of short and easy-to-do activities and experiments for the classroom or at home. We are going to be revitalising all our activity packs for next year.

"Please make it known about resources online earlier so we can plan them in for curriculum time."

- We send out bi-monthly newsletters to everyone on the NSEW mailing list (April-August) and monthly newsletters (August-March), which detail updates to our resources. We also produce in excess of 45,000 flyers which get posted to the Headteacher/Science Co-ordinator of every UK school in November. The resources remain online year-round with new resources being added to the website each September. We can look into email reminders as soon as the resources become available.

"Better products on the NSEW shop website!"

- We will be looking at the effectiveness of the online shop this year and aim to change supplier and products.

"It would be good to be able to obtain the freebies online."

- Freebie's form part of the incentive to take part in our mass participation projects and are posted out in March. We also offer marketing materials on the NSEW website, this year for example we posted 190,000 bookmarks to event organisers around the country. These are made available online, but we will look at making them available as organisers register their events. It should also be noted that the British Science Association is a charity and we have a very tight budget with which to operate in, so unfortunately are not in a position to be able to offer a large amount of freebies.

"Send us some information on available funding agencies that we can apply for."

- Each September we publish an updated 'How to Obtain Funding' guide and make it freely available online. This includes a wide range of funding bodies across the UK which event organisers can apply to for funds. We also provide our own grant scheme to schools and organisations in Wales and Scotland, which we publicise widely.

Marketing materials

"Posters bookmarks and other gift such as prizes for the attendees would have made the event more memorable for the students. Some leaflets about NSEW would have been useful."

"Only received bookmarks in marketing material and not enough for each child"

- Each year we produce a range of marketing materials (posters, bookmarks, stickers and leaflets). We target 45,000 separate organisations (schools, college, STEM providers, museums, libraries) across the UK with information about the Week. This year we sent bookmarks, in addition to posters and stickers, to just under 1000 organisers across the country, these were distributed in packs of 100 (1-5 packs), and organisers were asked how many packs they needed. We had to limit the number we distributed in order to be able to satisfy as many people as we could. This is the first time we had distributed bookmarks on such a large scale, and ended up producing more to satisfy demand, within the constraints of our budget. Next year we are changing the way these freebies can be ordered to ensure more people have the opportunity to obtain them.

PR

"Guidance on publicity specific to the area where the event was held."

"Help with publicising the event to local newspapers and media."

- This is a good idea, and we have had quite a few requests for this. We do produce a general guide to publicity, which contains example press releases and instructions on how to pitch. In 2011 we will produce a more targeted 'Media' pack which will be available in January and contain information such as logos, banner ads and press-releases and editor's notes specific to the projects on offer. With just over 4000 events we unfortunately don't have the capacity to inform the

press of everything that's going on, but we do aim to help organisers as much as possible to achieve this on their own.

"Some of our talks were very poorly attended and two had to be cancelled due to lack of bookings. More marketing support in terms of producing local programmes, more national publicity to send people to the NSEW website."

"More promotion"

"Please get local radio involved - they can reach a wide and diverse audience. It would have been nice to have NSEW mentioned in some of the recent 'ground-breaking' science TV programs [e.g. Wonders of the Solar System etc.]."

"Media coverage overall disappointing."

"Get more national coverage. Not many people knew it was NSEW."

"We did not attract TV coverage: if there was a regional/national media/event-holder contacts list, we would like to be included."

- While we spend a considerable amount of time and resource on PR and marketing, we still can't guarantee that everybody knows about NSEW. We do send press releases to regional and national press around the country, and work with an external PR company to pitch awareness-raising stories to national print and broadcast media. Due to the nature of the media there is no guarantee of coverage and while we had more regional newspaper and national online coverage than ever before, our national broadcast coverage was low compared with previous years.
- However, with thousands of events to potentially cover we need your support to continue to increase regional coverage. If you think your event would be of interest to the press (either regional or national) please contact our press officer Ollie Christophers at ollie.christophers@britishscienceassociation.org or on 020 7019 4946. Please also read our How to guide 'How to generate publicity for your event'.
- There are a large number of events nationally and we are unable to personally promote individual events – we can provide help and support, and if we believe the event has national reach we can help further with specific press and PR efforts, however we are limited in what we can do with a small team and budget.

"You may be surprised and frustrated to learn that some science teachers said they didn't know it was NSEW"

"Help notify more people, especially schools."

- We send direct mail to every school in the UK in October each year with information about NSEW and how they can get involved. We also email every school in the run-up to NSEW, with information on our resources and event programme. Unfortunately we don't have an advertising budget to target trade press, but this year we did have more schools taking part in NSEW than before.

Timing of NSEW

"Maybe the time slot could be extended e.g. NSE Month?"

"Difficulty getting the range of visitors into school that we would have liked to because many were already involved in NSEW events in other places. Perhaps there could be a longer slot of time for the events."

"It comes at a difficult time of year for secondary schools"

"I feel that Yr5 and Yr6 felt it was too near to SATs and may do their science week later on."

"A warmer time of the year please."

"Move it to a better funding time - after April."

- The timing for NSEW was chosen in 1994 as the most appropriate time for NSEW for all involved. A National Science & Engineering Month would disperse both the focus to organise events, and the media attention, away from the campaign and as a result it would not be as impactful as there would be less public interest.
- Universities are on holiday from June which would make their involvement problematic. Any earlier than March, and it would be too cold to run activities outdoors. If it was held before winter in September schools would not have enough time to prepare for it.
- As the dates of NSEW are set a couple of years in advance it is almost impossible to avoid all school exams (as timetables for these become available much later), however, we do our best to hold the Week at the most convenient time possible for everyone with the information we have.
- From a British Science Association standpoint, we hold NSEW during March as it is about six months away from the British Science Festival. This means that the British Science Association can concentrate all its efforts on one project at a time.

Event Programme

"A problem of clashing events - some mechanism to foster liaison between different organisers to achieve a better mix of events each day (in cities/big towns at least)"

- We do have an email group for NSEW organisers and over the last two years have encouraged organisers to sign-up and use it to share ideas etc. Unfortunately nobody uses it. We will look at the possibility of an online forum where organisers can sign-in and share information and ideas. Our online programme does provide information about which public events are taking place during the Week; this would be the best place to check what events are already planned before organising your own.
- You might be interested in attending a local information session – if one is available in your area – to meet local contacts and NSEW event organisers to discuss new ideas. We will be start making sessions available across the UK from August.

Website

"Website development is in progress, apparently."

"Because I am not able to access the website due to school security systems. Your support staff have been informed but do not seem to want to help."

- The website is under review and we are aiming to make it easier for people to sign-up and register their events. We have spoken with our developers and are unable to allow our website to bypass the security systems on individual servers – this is up to each organisation to allow their web-users to visit our website and download resources and submit online forms.

School Grants

"Needs to be confirmed earlier - I lost my first booking + we cannot afford to risk booking without grant"

"I missed the grant application date. When should I apply for the next event?"

- The small grant scheme for schools opens for applications at the beginning of September. We aim for all the marketing to arrive in schools for the beginning of term in September. The closing date this year was the 9th November and applicants were informed of the outcome by the 23rd November. We need to give schools enough time to make their plans when applying, but will look at bringing forward the closing date; however, this will mean less time to submit applications.

"Not awarded full grant."

"Implication on letter was that money would be allowed with no problem - we only got a part grant and this has cost our school a lot of money which we just don't have. The process means you have to book prior to receiving notification or grant success."

- The grants offered to each successful applicant were between £200 – £300, this was stated in the information about the grant which should be read by all applicants and the majority of schools were awarded this amount. To be eligible for more than this schools had to fall into more than one of the eligibility criteria, involve a large number of pupils and/or the local community, include an exciting, ambitious and innovative event proposal and demonstrate plans for a lasting impact/legacy of the grant.

"Unfortunately the grant only paid for half the cost of the visit. Thus, we had no money to target other year groups within the school. "

- The Small Grant Scheme for Schools fund is limited and therefore highly competitive. For NSEW 2010 we had over 1000 applications and could only fund approximately 450 schools. We try to award grants to as many schools as we can, it is for this reason that the grants are small and that schools requesting £300+ are unsuccessful. A lot of very worthy schools were unfortunately turned down this year.

"Some confusion as to when the grant money was being transferred by BACS"

- The majority of schools were paid their grants by the end of December, some at the end of January. There can be a delay in payment if we have been given incorrect bank details or schools take a long time to get back to us in accepting the grant. No grant money is sent out without confirmation that the school wishes to receive the grant.

"We were disappointed to see that our rural location was not deemed rural enough in the application process! We spend a great deal of our limited funds on transport costs, ensuring our children get to experience a wide range of activities."

"It would be great if you could re-visit the criteria and make it more accessible to Lincolnshire Primary Schools, many of which are very remote and have limited or no ethnic minorities and thus, do not currently meet the criteria for funding."

"We are only a very small school for severely disabled pupils, we have very limited resources, we did not receive a grant."

"We have almost 95%+ ethnic minority chn, but we didn't get the full grant, although i feel we were eligible."

- The eligibility criteria for the grants have to be set at quite a high benchmark due to the scheme's popularity. We only have enough funding to award around 500 schools throughout the whole of the UK.

"By the time I knew I had the grant, my first choice event was fully booked. Process needs to start earlier e.g. in September."

- NSEW is a very busy time for science shows and presenters and to secure the presenters you want schools may need to book before the grant is confirmed. We

process applications as quickly as we can to allow you as much time as possible to arrange your events – successful applicants are informed 4 months prior to NSEW. The NSEW team also produces resources and ideas that schools can use during NSEW as an alternative to hiring a presenter so if you are unable to secure a booking there are lots of other things that the school can do.

Misc.

"I greatly enjoyed participating in the event. I would like to compare our experiences with those of other event organisers and presenters in Wales. Can the NSEW team help with this?"

- We organize at least 2 NSEW information sessions in Wales in September/October that are open to anyone in the region who wants to organise an event for the Week. These sessions are designed to exchange ideas with other organisers. Full information is provided on www.nsew.org.uk in the run-up to the sessions. You might also be interested in attending the Science Alliance Cymru meetings of STEM providers across Wales.

"Design some feedback forms for small group activity, rather than all the same."

- Our feedback forms for event attendees are designed to provide very basic feedback from events and activities and are suited to activities of various sizes. For 2011 we are developing the forms so they can also be more useful to event organisers to collect more specific information about their event.

"Attendees don't want to fill in questionnaire on a 'fun evening.'"

- Only a small proportion of NSEW event attendees fill in evaluation forms and we only suggest to event organisers that they distribute the forms around at their event. We have also put together online versions of the forms so attendees can complete forms after the event if they wish to do so.

"There was widespread surprise among our presenters and others involved... that we didn't even make it to the top three of your 'best event' awards, particularly given the size of our event and the broad STEM nature of our material."

- The NSEW Event Awards is highly competitive due to the large number of events that are submitted. There are 5 categories to try and even out the events that make it through but unfortunately we can't award all events.

"It would be helpful if you could provide us with a list of presenters in our local area that would come to the school."

- For a good source of all presenters and volunteers available to schools go to www.sciencelive.net. There are also many ways in which schools can organise events without the need for presenters, for more ideas go to our website (www.nsew.org.uk).