

BA Festival of Science in Norwich, 2006
The x-change, Monday 4th September



Panellists:

- **Dr Claire Davis**, the BA's Isambard Kingdom Brunel Award Lecturer, University of Birmingham
- **Dr Penny Fidler**, Independent Consultant
- **Professor Bruce Hood**, University of Bristol
- **Dr Harry Witchel**, University of Bristol

Demonstrations and other entertainment by:

- **Dr Lizzie Burns**, Medical Research Council
- **Dr Anne Edwards**, John Innes Centre, Norwich
- **James Piercy**, INSPIRE Discovery Center
- **Mark Stevenson**, Comedian

Host: **Quentin Cooper**

The first x-change event of the year was held at the Blue Bar in UEA on Monday evening. There was a good attendance (and no audience members leaving in the middle of talks!), and plenty of interactive material from all the panelists and demos.

We started off with Dr Penny Fidler, helped by Dr Lizzie Burns, who ran a quick 'Build your own brain' competition. Dr Fidler went on to talk about how most of what we perceive about the world around us is a 'best guess' by our brains, dependent on previous experience.

We then had James Piercy, who attempted to envelope an audience member in a soap bubble. He told us the secret ingredient for getting good bubbles was glycerine, which kept the bubble from dehydrating and bursting too quickly.

Next Professor Bruce Hood talked to us about people's belief in superstitions and magic. He hypothesized it as being an extension of our childhood where we developed beliefs as a way of understanding our complicated world.

Dr Claire Davis, a materials scientist, explained the role of new and better materials being used in sporting technology. She did a quick demonstration of how the elasticity of the strings in a tennis racquet can have a very visible effect on how much bounce you can get with the ball.

When asked by an audience member her views on the use of better equipment to enhance athletes abilities, as opposed to the use of performance enhancing drugs, her reply was, 'Drugs harm the body.'

For something different, we then had science-comedian Mark Stevenson do a short spot which included the wonderful facts, 'Public speaking is better after sex,' and 'Wearing socks increases female orgasms by 30%'

Due to the lack of time, panellist Dr Harry Witchel was only able to say that the 'Beautiful Brains' session earlier in the day had been 'Very Good'.

We ended our first x-change of the week with Dr Anne Edwards who brought in some home-brewed beers using several-hundred year-old recipes. She also gave us some good and bad cures for hangovers (which we will obviously need after drinking all that beer!).

Mithila Shafiq