

Science Communication Conference 2007

Executive summary of evaluation

The 2007 Science Communication Conference was held on 14 & 15 May at the Institution of Engineering and Technology, Savoy Place, London. The structure of the conference was similar to last year, with several sessions splitting into three or six strands. Consequently more delegates were able to attend than in the early years of the Science Communication Conference and more speakers and chairs were used. In total, 392 people attended this year's conference, including 320 delegates, 15 chairs and 57 speakers. This was an increase on last year's 279 delegates and speakers. 73 had attended last year's conference as a speaker or delegate.

In 2007, the second day of the workshop had a particular focus on climate change. Delegates could choose to attend just one day of the conference or both. 122 delegates attended just day one and 76 delegates attended just day two.

102 feedback forms were returned (26% of the delegates and speakers).

87% of delegates rated their overall satisfaction with the conference as very satisfied or satisfied

98% of delegates strongly agreed or agreed that the conference was well organised

Most delegates mentioned more than one reason for attending the conference. The major reason given was to network (42% of people commenting mentioned this), but a significant number of delegates were also interested in keeping up to date and learning about science communication (35%). Interestingly, 24% of people mentioned a particular interest in climate change. Delegates were also seeking training and support (15%), looking for ideas and inspiration (15%), and hearing about good practice and others' experience (15%).

Delegates agreed that the conference supports the community by getting people together, sharing best practice and expertise, bringing the community up to date with current policy and also as a place for debate and discussion about current issues. 79% of respondents felt that the conference contributes to the future direction of science communication.

13% of people stated that no particular topics were missing from the conference programme. A further 13% pointed out that not all topics can be addressed in two days, but it was a good programme anyway. 6% answered that they didn't know what had been missed.

"Our area is vast, and it is not possible to cover it comprehensively in a two day workshop. I think that the workshop programme was a good balance of the most important developments and issues."

However, people particularly felt that the conference lacked sharing of best practice and expertise (27% of the 64 people who commented). Others tended to mention that a particular view was missing from a specific session.

Session 9 on communicating uncertainty was the most popular, as it was considered central to the difficulties facing science communicators today. Kathy Sykes' session describing progress since 2006 was also popular, seen as a wide-ranging and comprehensive. 29% of respondents did not specify a session that was particularly poor. However, the session on international perspectives was considered out of date and didn't focus on appropriate topics. The conference plenary from Malcolm Wicks was also unpopular, as delegates who commented felt that his speech had not taken the specific needs of the audience into account and that he did not contribute a great deal to the interesting discussion that had preceded his arrival.

The IET was thought to be an excellent venue with good catering. Almost all comments about the organisation of the conference were positive.

Delegates were asked who they thought were not present at the conference but should have been. A wide range of people were mentioned, including people from overseas or with an international perspective, those working at higher education institutions, and journalists/people working in the media.

- 88% strongly agreed or agreed that there was enough time for audience discussion
- 88% strongly agreed or agreed that there was enough time for networking
- 84% strongly agreed or agreed that the conference programme was well structured
- 95% strongly agreed or agreed that they felt welcome to ask a question
- 98% strongly agreed or agreed that the conference was well organised

The session types were ranked in order of importance for the conference in 2008:

1. Sharing good practice
2. Hearing case studies
3. Hearing about top-level policy issues
4. Formulating conference-specific strategy and/or recommendations

The main other comments were thanks for an enjoyable conference. Many delegates made suggestions for the structure and content of the conference.

Information about all delegates and speakers was gathered as they booked online. When asked which field they worked in, 54% stated science communication, 28% education and 17% research science. Most delegates selected more than one field.

Delegates described their ethnicity as follows: 89% white, 3% black or black British, 2% Asian or Asian British, 2% mixed, 2% Chinese or Chinese British, and 1% 'other'. 1% did not answer.