

## **The Science Communication Conference 24th - 25th May 2004**

### **Session 3 – OST Science in Society Programme**

#### **Dr. Sarah Macnaughton, Manager of Public Engagement with Science and Technology Programme for OST:**

Thanks very much, thanks very much also to Suzi for the introduction, I'd forgotten I was a contaminated land scientist but there you go. One thing that came across yesterday was that very few people actually had PowerPoint slides which was really refreshing, especially for a scientist, you know, at a conference as obviously a science and communication specialist. I am going to put a stop to that, I'm sorry. I just want to let you know that I did actually cut 4 slides this morning, so it will be a little shorter.

What I'm going to be talking about today is the program of the public engagement with science and technology that OST is currently starting to implement. I'll give a brief feedback on the summary of last year's consultation on the Science in Society, and let me just get this right, as the findings from last year's public consultation on the OST's response to the public consultation on the BA Report 'Science in Society' from 2002, I think I got that right, and this really provided an opportunity for you guys and the whole science community to comment on OST's plans for the implementation of the program of activities. After that I'll follow on with a little bit of talk about where we are now.

Looking first at the consultation, as you can see there, there were 54 very good in-depth, very thoughtful responses that were very, very useful. There was a full range of those organisations and individuals. Responses came from the private sector, public and the voluntary and they were incredibly useful. They tended to be generally supportive of the program which was really, really very useful, however they did also point out some ways in which we could improve what we were planning on implementing and so looking in particular at promoting a need-based activity, and how the program itself could improve targeting and evaluation of Science in Society activity, and if you actually want to get a copy of that the website is there and I can get that website to you if you don't have it afterwards.

So where are we now? Well at the moment the actual closing date for the consultation was the 30<sup>th</sup> June and a lot has happened since. The programme itself covers two main slats and strands at the moment, and there's the information gathering which is a number of different projects trying to put the information together about what's going on right now in Science in Society and there's also the OST grant scheme, a reacted theme-based scheme, and I will come onto that later at the end of the presentation.

Moving on though with the program of research into public engagement with an attitude towards science, and this is being done in order to get a picture of

the participation in the existing activities, the barriers to that participation and the areas and interests and awareness of science amongst the public, or the public's, get that right....at the moment we're at the stage where we have a contractor appointed by we are obviously in legal nightmare hell at the moment so unfortunately I can't actually announce anything right now but I will be able to....OST will be able to announce something fairly shortly.

Following on from your recommendations it's going to be both qualitative and quantitative research and there will be a strong focus on the under-represented groups that we've been mentioning all the way through the conference so far. The idea is that the findings from this will help improve targeting for future activities and also it enables us to monitor and respond to what is happening in a very rapidly changing community and the first report out on this research into public attitudes will be due in January 2005. Linked to this in some ways is a Science in Society activities database, and this is a two year pilot database at the moment. Again, taking your points from the consultation document, this will be building on the work that's already been done by others and other sources that are available, including Setnet, Pscicom, the BA, it will be aimed at the science communication community as well as the policy makers, and at the general public so that they can use it and find out more about what's happening in science in society and science communication.

To quote from one of you in the consultation document 'This should allow the establishment a central pool of ideas and activities which hopefully will then enable as much from our point of view the experience of spreading good practice, it should give better visibility to the current and future activities that are currently going on and also help to identify the different gaps and overlaps in science communication'. Again, this is in the middle of being contracted but hopefully the database will be producing some useful data for us by 2004, the end of.

Taking these two bits, the research and the database together, we move onto a needs analysis, essentially mapping the findings from the research onto what's happening with the database so they aren't....trying to answer the question 'is the provision meeting the public need?'. This should help us with changing the future priorities and this report will start going in to work towards the end of this year but should be available for discussion at the Science Communication Conference in 2005.

Moving on again, as I said, sorry about the amazing number of PowerPoint slides, something that we have appointed a contractor, people, science, and policy, and Suzanne King is here today and she will be answering your questions if you have any for her, and this is for some OST and some Research Council joint initiatives, looking into guidelines and putting together some guidelines for practitioners and funders on evaluating public engagement activities. Not only activities but also funding streams, the idea being to look against objectives, smart objectives for example, but also to see

what guidelines we can put together for impacts and outcomes of the public engagement activity. Obviously there is again a lot of information already out there, but this should be drawing some of this together into a document pretty similar to the public dialogue document that the Research Council produced last year. Again, publication of this is due in late 2004.

And that moves onto the last part of the information gathering which is a media monitoring project. Again, taking your comments from the consultation, it won't just be looking at what's going on without actually taking it any further, the idea is that, by looking at the media over a period of time we will be able to get an idea of the tone of the coverage that's coming out, and it will provide a media background to the evaluation activities that are going on at the moment, and in the future. So hopefully that will help the whole community get a lot more out of its media activities, and this should be due to begin again within the next few weeks.

Moving on, just two more slides to go, and it's the single OST grant scheme. Now this is a thematic reactive scheme, again, this should be announced fairly shortly but certainly it will be launched at the BA Festival of Science in September. The whole idea of the scheme is that it will build capacity. These are the current themes that will be included in the scheme, but it's a reactive programme, it will depend on how the community is going, it will depend on how the community is changing and what the community needs are. So again, it will be very much a consultative process by which we will be listening, OST will be listening to what you say you would like to see in the scheme.

And the future, firstly this is a large program of activities, a lot of which requires quite a lot of work making sure that everything starts at the right time, everything starts and that everything actually fits together in one programme. So that's going to be going on over the next 18 months or so. There will be a proper programme evaluation at the end of the period, and we also receive a lot of very useful strategic advice from the Council for Science and Technology. The most important thing though is that we continue to consult with the science communication community and you continue to let us know, let OST know what it is that you want to see coming out of this programme. Thank you.