



Formulating a new vision
for the BA

Annual Review 2003



The BA is a charity whose mission is to connect science with people, making science itself and the ways in which it is applied accessible to all.

At the BA, we recognize that science has intrinsic cultural value, is vital to our quality of life and economic development, and must develop within our democratic processes. We are working to connect science with people. That is why we are committed to making science accessible.

The BA aims to promote openness about the role of science in society, between the public, policy-makers and other decision-

makers, and the scientific and business community. We work to engage and inspire adults and young people directly with science and technology, and their implications.

The BA would like to thank all its supporters and sponsors, including its main funders during 2002 - 2003: the Office of Science and Technology, the Wellcome Trust and the Royal Society.

'The BA is working towards a society in which people are comfortable with the ways science is being carried out and new technological developments implemented. The BA is recognised as the national body that acts as the glue between the scientific community, policy and decision-makers, and the public with the aim of an improved mutual understanding. It furthers discussion and debate about science in society, The BA is the obvious organisation to take forward the debate on science in society.'

Dr Roland Jackson, Chief Executive

Think, react, interfere

'Science in society is now a major issue: public participation, perception and understanding of science are critical to a healthy and advancing science and technology. The BA wants to have a real impact, with tangible outcomes.'

Fiona Barbargallo, Science in Society Manager

The BA's Science in Society team is driving forward public discussion about the impact of key areas of science, technology and medicine. We make sure that people's views are not just heard, but listened to.

Over the last year, our Science and Public Affair Forums have produced reports which have fed into key consultations including the Department of Health's consultation on the draft Mental Health Bill and the Nuffield Council for Bioethics' consultation on pharmacogenetics. We played a major role in the Government's national debate on genetically modified foods, commissioned by the Office of Science and Technology to facilitate the science strand through our

network of regional offices.

Our Science in Society programme regulars - the SPA Forums and sciBARS - have been complemented by an innovative event designed to allow the audience to set the agenda, the x-change. Developed from a regular event at the Festival of Science, the x-change gives the audience the opportunity to comment on the key issues of the day that concern them.



The BA promotes open discussion about science in society to support and inform policy-making, and runs activities that engage and inspire people of all ages with science and its implications.

Everyone's a winner

'All children should be inspired by the sheer wonder of the world around them and the amazing extent of what we know and don't know about the universe. We want them to understand the potential benefits of science and technology, its limitations and the concerns that scientific progress continually raises for society.'

Dr Roland Jackson, Chief Executive, the BA

The BA works with people of all ages to bring science to life, and especially with young people. Our awards schemes - the BA First and Young Investigators, BA CREST Awards and BA Science Communicators Awards - draw science out of the textbook and into their hands.

This year, over 30,000 students from primary through to further education received our awards, and over 20,000 took part in science discovery days around the country from Teesside to Leicester and from Crewe to London.

During February 2003, the BA CREST Science Fair brought together all the BA's science achievement celebrations into a single high-profile event held at the Royal Society. The evening recognised the achievements of the UK's top young scientists - the innovators, entrepreneurs, teachers and leaders of the future.

Through the support of the BA and its sponsors, several of the award-winning

students are able to go on to take part in international science fairs, competing for recognition and reward on a global scale. The standard of the projects on display this year was higher than ever, impressing judges and visitors alike. Also, for the first time, entrants took part in a careers fair, encouraging them to follow through with their achievements and pursue a career in science.



Improving the quality of life

The BA's flagship event, the Festival of Science, took place at the University of Leicester, with the theme 'Quality of Life'. With talks by Sir David Attenborough and Sir Paul Nurse, amongst others, the quality of the Festival was in no doubt...

The rise in childhood obesity, fears of abuse of anti-anthrax drugs and why tall buildings make Manchester so wet - all



stories to come out of the BA Festival of Science 2002 at the University of Leicester.

With over 300 speakers and thousands of visitors, the Festival was once again a huge success. But news from the Festival stretches far beyond Leicester's city limits thanks to the army of 150 journalists who attend the festival to keep their readers, listeners and viewers abreast of the stories and issues as they emerge throughout the week. With live broadcasts on the 'Today' programme and a front page headline in the Daily Mail, the BA Festival of Science reached phenomenally wide-ranging audiences.

Under the auspices of Science Year, the Festival saw a special conference on science education, which attracted Lord Sainsbury,

Sir Harry Kroto and a large audience of science educators. Feedback from the conference was excellent.

Furthering our commitment to open discussion, our Science and Religion Forum brought together scientists and representatives from different religious traditions and ethnic groups. Those taking part had the opportunity to explore the demands of citizenship and humanity and the role of science and religion.

And with the Antarctic Waves making music from science, the Sleek Geeks discussing the scientific way to light a barbecue and a Cancer Research UK pop band, no one could accuse us of being elitist! We really can claim to have something for everyone.

'Science, engineering and technology shape the world we live in. The BA plays a vital role in creating opportunities for people of all ages to learn about, debate and question the role science plays in our lives today.'

Sir David Attenborough, BBC Wildlife Presenter

A cacophony of science

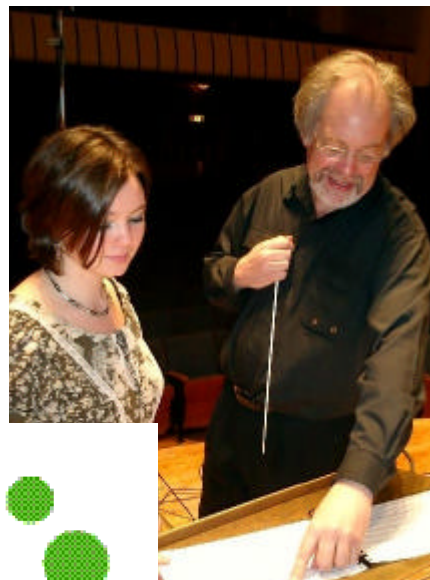
'National Science Week... encourages people to engage with science through informative and fun events, and provides scientists with an opportunity to talk to people about their research and gain an understanding of the public's views' - Prime Minister Tony Blair

The Prime Minister's words were a welcome endorsement as National Science Week entered its tenth year, and recognised the support of the thousands of people around the country who give their time organising and running events for people of all ages.

National Science Week shows just how far-reaching science can be. In Northern Ireland, visitors to the interactive discovery centre, W5, were treated to special version of a certain reality TV show in a great event called Bug Brother. Wales undertook a massive project to find out how physically active people in the country are. And in Birmingham, the Repertory Theatre hosted Descent by

critically-acclaimed playwright Carl Miller.

The Week coincided with National Orchestra



contestants to compose an original piece of music inspired by science or based on a scientific theme. The competition attracted a great response and the winner, Rosemary Toll, was able to hear her piece, *About Fish*, a short musical

piece based on Antarctic science, played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra live at the Royal Festival Hall, London.

Once again, National Science Week was something to make a noise about. For details of past and future NSW programmes and resources visit www.the-ba.net/NSW.



Week, but who said anything about two cultures? Together, the two driving forces behind these two initiatives, the BA and the Association of British Orchestras, in partnership with the British Antarctic Survey, ran a unique competition called Compose Yourself. This challenged

Advancing science communication

'Science communicators play a key role in engaging with the public and helping to forge a more confident relationship of mutual understanding between science and society.' - Lord Sainsbury

At the 2002 BA Festival of Science, the Office of Science and Technology (OST) commissioned the BA to prepare a special report. As a result of the report, the BA was able to recommend the processes the government should put in place to ensure that the science and society agenda is being properly addressed in the UK. The OST published its implementation plan in September 2003, building on all the BA's recommendations.

The OST was recognising the outstanding contribution that the BA makes to the field of science communication. Amongst our initiatives is the Science Communication Conference, held this year in partnership with the Royal Society, with contributions

from people including Sir Paul Nurse, Trevor Phillips (Commission for Racial Equality) and Dr Liz Rasekoala (African Caribbean Network for Science and Technology).

The Science Communication Working Lunches were launched at last year's Festival, bringing together people from across the science communication community to share practical ideas. Since their launch, they have also appeared in Edinburgh and the Orkneys.

AlphaGalileo, which provides an internet press service giving access to European research news, images, background information

and a database of experts, and which was a project of the BA since its early days, became an independent company in 2003. The BA is proud to have supported AlphaGalileo's development and wishes it every further success in the future. For further information, visit: www.alphagalileo.org



'As a long term supporter of the BA I believe that the work the BA does to improve the communication of science is vital. I am particularly impressed with the BA's Media Fellowships. Giving practising scientists the chance to work in the media helps form links and understanding which can only benefit the relationship between science and the public.'

Carol Vorderman, TV Presenter

Something for everyone, everywhere

The BA puts people at the heart of science, aiming to make science accessible to as many people as possible.



The BA is all about variety. Whether it is schoolchildren firing AlkaSeltzer rockets in Crewe, scientists in Wales discussing the implications of GM technology or a lady in a bar in Plymouth discussing climate change in the Amazon, the BA has something to offer to everyone, everywhere.

Thanks to the dedication of BA supporters, our Branches grew in strength and number during 2003. A number of new Branches were established, including an affiliation with the

Yorkshire Philosophical Society, where the BA was founded as the British Association for the Advancement of Science back in 1831. This takes our total number of Branches to 31 around the UK.

The BA would not - could not! - exist without its volunteers, and to recognise the time and commitment that so many people put into making us such a success,

we have launched the Sir Walter Bodmer Award for Volunteers, named after a past Chair of the BA Council and a passionate advocate of volunteers in science communication. The award winner will be announced in National Volunteers' Week in June 2004.

'Being a member of the BA gives me access to informed views and discussion about the wider issues of science in an informal way through its excellent range of events and publications.'

Elaine Snell, Public Relations Consultant

Lightening up...

It is fair to say that the BA does some pretty serious stuff, but we manage to have some fun, too. After all, we are trying to bring science to life.



Any visitor to one of our BAYSDAYS in London, Leicester, Crewe and Teesside - and there were thousands of visitors - will have realised how much fun science can be. Gigantic grasshoppers? The magic and wizardry (and science, of course) of Harry Potter? "Madflap inventors"? This needs a bit of fleshing out! Indeed, all around the country people were enjoying science activities. Even Princess Anne, a past president of the BA was spotted at the BA's stand at the Royal Highland Show finding out the science of custard.

Of course, it would be hard to mention fun without talking about LaughLab. Launched in 2001, the quest to find the UK's funniest joke grew into a worldwide phenomenon. Together with Science Year and Professor Richard Wiseman from the University of Hertfordshire, we announced the result of the on-line experiment in October 2002. With over 50,000 jokes submitted and over 1 million website hits, we can reveal that the funniest joke is:

A couple of hunters are out in the woods when one of them falls to the ground. He doesn't seem to be breathing; his eyes are rolled back in his head. The other guy whips out his phone and calls the emergency services. He gasps, "My friend is dead! What can I do?" The operator in a calm, soothing voice says, "Just take it easy, I can help. First, let's make sure he's dead."

There is a silence, and then a shot is heard. The hunter's voice comes back on the line saying, "OK, now what?"



...and looking ahead

Looking ahead, 2004 sees the launch of the BA's new website. By visiting www.the-ba.net, you will be able to obtain information on the issues making news, find out the opinions of key scientists and have your say. For teachers and students there will be access to a wealth of resources.

And, finally, in September 2003, the BA's head office moves to the Wellcome Wolfson Building in South Kensington, London. We shall be sharing the building with the Science Museum and the European Dana Alliance for the Brain (EDAB). Most exciting, however, is our involvement in the Dana Centre, which is located in the building. The Dana Centre promises to be a unique, inspiring and innovative centre for the public to discuss science and its impact on people and society, and where the public will set the agenda. The centre opens on 18 November 2003.



Not just another venue to promote science, the Dana Centre will be the place for the most experimental dialogue events in a world-first format, blending the best from science, art, performance and multimedia. The place where current perceptions are challenged and where the issues behind contemporary science are tackled head on, as a matter of course.