



National Science Week 2006 Evaluation Report

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Overview

National Science Week, coordinated by the BA (British Association for the Advancement of Science), consists of hundreds of events running in parallel throughout the whole of the UK. With no restrictions on who can organise events, the topics on which they are focused, the audience or the venue, the resulting programme is a hugely varied and eclectic mix suitable for people of all ages and abilities.

The National Science Week evaluation chiefly concentrates upon the examining the demographics of the organisers, presenters and attendees of the events and the relationships between all of these groups and the BA. We will try to identify how we can continue to improve our service to our organisers, how we can improve National Science Week generally, both in terms of the public perception and in terms of internal logistics, and also how we can further meet the aims and objectives of National Science Week and the BA as a whole.

This report has been produced by Joanna Rooke.

Methodology

416 organisers with 1036 registered events received the evaluation pack. 127 organisers completed and returned questionnaires for 230 events (22% response rate), 1844 attendees completed questionnaires at 145 events and 301 presenters at 161 events.

This report includes data from four main sources:

- the National Science Week database.
- completed and returned evaluation questionnaires¹.
- printed and broadcast media data supplied by Romeike².
- a National Opinion Poll omnibus survey³.

All statistics are taken from the questionnaire data unless otherwise stated.

Event numbers

National Science Week 2006 had 1,227 registered events, an increase on the 1,090 registered in 2005 (which also incorporated Einstein Year) and 1,013 registered in 2004.

The media trawl in 2006 also uncovered a particularly high number of unregistered events (446; 27% of the total number of events).

Geographic distribution of events and organisers

In total there were 484 registered organisers in 2006 compared to 374 in 2005. 274 (57%) of whom had never registered an event before.

In terms of regional distribution of events, the South East of England remains the most prolific region with also the greatest increase in numbers of events from 245 to 307 events (25%). A decrease in the number of registered events was recorded in Wales and the Eastern region but the regions with the lowest number of events (under 50) were the West Midlands and Northern Ireland.

¹ All questionnaires received by 30th March 2006 were compiled in this report.

² Romeike is an independent media monitoring service (0800 289 543 for further information).

³ This survey was conducted by NOP World over three weekends (3 – 5 March, 10 – 12 March & 24 – 26 April).

Organiser profile

According to the evaluation, the vast majority of organisers are in full or part time employment (82%). Approximately half of this group are made up people working in museums, schools or further education with the remainder working in other science based or educational organisations.

Just over two-thirds of organisers have studied science to degree level or above.

69% of organisers had run a National Science Week event before.

63% of organisers ran two or more other science events during the year indicating a high level of events experience amongst our organisers and also that taking part in National Science Week may already be part of their job remit. 24% of organisers only ever organise science events as part of National Science Week.

When asked if organisers would like to run another National Science Week event in the future, 88% of organisers said that they would and no organisers at all said that they would not.

Presenter profile

According to the evaluation, the majority of presenters were employed in either a research institute, further/higher education or a museum. Almost all the presenters were employed in some sort of scientific or educational organisation. 39% of presenters stated that they were employed as a "scientist".

Over three-quarters of presenters (77%) had studied science to degree level or above.

47% of total number of presenters (and 37% of the total number of "scientists") had never presented at a National Science Week event before. 96% of presenters said that they would definitely or probably consider taking part in National Science Week next year.

Attendee profile and estimate of numbers

According to the evaluation, the majority of attendees were school students (62%), followed by people in full-time employment and retired people.

Just over half of the attendees (51%) had not heard of National Science Week before attending the event and 72% of attendees had not visited a National Science Week event before. 57% of attendees, however, had been to science events outside of National Science Week and when asked whether they would like to visit an event in National Science Week next year, 80% of the respondents answered yes.

230 event questionnaires were returned and at those events there were approximately 75,840 attendees. If we extrapolate these figures to cover our estimated number of events we have a ball park estimate of 665,740 people for National Science Week as a whole.

Demographics: age and gender of organisers, presenters & attendees

The majority of NSW organisers are female (61%) and of those, the majority are within the 25-44 year old bracket (34% of all organisers).

The numbers of female and male presenters were quite similar although the spread of ages within each sex were very dissimilar, with more women in the 25-44 category and more men in the 45-64 category.

According to the evaluation the largest proportion of attendees of NSW events were in the age bracket 12-15 years old (39% of all attendees).

Demographics: ethnicity of organisers, presenters & attendees

The demographics of the attendees of National Science Week events (sample size= 1829) closely reflected the national profile of minority ethnic groups but, sadly, black/black British attendees were under represented. Organisers and presenters were also under represented in almost all black and minority ethnic groups (sample size = 128 and 295 respectively).

It is possible that this is a reflection of a low response rate to the evaluation (31% of organisers responded but information on attendees was only collected at 14% of the events), but we should make further moves to try and motivate and mobilise BME groups to take part in National Science Week.

Marketing and target audiences

When asked which methods of marketing organisers used to promote their events, the most popular answers were the National Science Week printed programme and direct mail outs.

The most popular target audience for events were secondary and primary schools followed by events for families and adults.

57% of organisers felt that their event was the size they had expected whereas 20% had an audience that was smaller than expected and 18% had an audience that was larger than expected.

The majority of people indicated that they had found out about the event via their school (52%) or word of mouth (19%). The next highest response was through the venue's own marketing (not related to NSW); this could have been in the form of the organisation's website or listings for example. Approximately 10% of people had heard of the event either via the NSW printed programme or via the BA website or online programme.

The majority of active organisers first find out about National Science Week via their professional contacts (59%) with the next highest definite answer being the BA website (9%). The BA printed programme currently only plays a tiny role in recruiting new organisers.

Support from the BA

All resource use increased with the exception of the guide to running events and the guide to funding events (NSW website was the highest used resource). The greatest increases in resource usage were seen in telephone and email support from the NSW team (up 10%), the NSW quiz (up 8%) and the challenge packs (up 5%).

80% of organisers said that they were happy with the level of support they received from the BA; with only 2% indicating that they were unhappy.

The aspect of support that had the highest amount of dissatisfaction was related to the marketing materials and advice available. Specific comments on this included organisers talking about wanting an earlier arrival date for the programmes, layout of the programme and the fact that attendees had not seen marketing materials regarding National Science Week before coming to their event.

Were the events considered a success?

The events rated extremely highly for all of the different aspects that were evaluated. 96% of organisers rated the event they visited as being either very or fairly interesting. The aspect that scored the least was topicality in which 83% of events were scored as being very or fairly topical.

Organisers were also asked how successful they considered their event to have been. Only 6% of respondents considered their event to have been not successful and a further 6% claimed it was only a part success. Reasons for an event not being a (total) success were mostly related to audience size (or lack thereof), but other reasons included weather, the event being pitched at the wrong level of audience and operational problems.

52% of the organisers considered their event to be very successful and a further 30% considered their event to be successful. Reasons given for an event's success included a high level of attendees, the attraction of new audiences, enthusiastic response from participants and excellent activities.

Illuminate

In January 2006, the BA launched a photographic competition, in conjunction with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). This competition was open to people of all ages and the winning entries were displayed in the Dana Centre throughout National Science Week.

The competitions main aim was to raise awareness in the build up to National Science Week, to provide a national activity for organisers to take part in and to try to reach a new type of audience.

There were at least two other science photography competitions which launched at a similar time to "Illuminate" so media coverage was not as great as anticipated. However, the level of entries was high, around 200 online and a further 200 by post, and the majority of the entrants to the competition were new to National Science Week activity, i.e., were not on our database. The Illuminate webpage also had 2,220 hits in the run up to National Science Week.

Click for the Climate

As part of National Science Week 2006, the BA, in conjunction with ESRC, ran an energy saving campaign called "Click for the Climate" which was launched at the start of the week. This project was a simple pledging system in which people of all ages could go online to the BA website and pledge to alter a small aspect of their behaviour in order to save energy during National Science Week and hopefully beyond.

This project was undertaken with the help of the Energy Saving Trust and also CRED, the Community Carbon Reduction Programme based at the University of East Anglia.

A number of celebrity pledges were secured in advance of the launch of the "Click" campaign including, amongst others, Tony Blair, David Cameron, Colin Jackson and Professor Robert Winston. A photo opportunity was also secured outside No. 10 Downing Street. These two things combined helped boost the media profile of National Science Week and managed to generate coverage in 9 national newspapers on the day of the launch.

During March, the "Click" webpage had more visits than the BA home page (12,643 compared to 12,579). The campaign managed to attract around 25,000 pledges from almost 7,000 people, saving approximately 1845 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions (the equivalent of 1230 hot air balloons).

Media evaluation

Coverage for National Science Week 2006 has risen significantly from 1,219 pieces of coverage (both articles in the press and in broadcast media) in 2005 to 1,562 pieces in 2006. This breaks down into 1,464 press articles (106 national, 1358 regional) and 98 broadcast pieces. Coverage in national, regional and broadcast media has all increased compared to 2005.

Printed Coverage

719 written publications covered National Science Week, 66 of which were national publications and the remaining 654 being regional press. 12 daily national newspapers covered National Science Week including 7 tabloids and 5 broadsheets. 2 Sunday tabloids and 2 Sunday broadsheets also covered National Science Week.

Approximately 58% of articles refer to registered events and 39% of articles refer to non-registered events. The majority of unregistered events were internal school events.

The number of articles referring to our awareness raising activities has increased dramatically from 17 (Universe) in 2005 to 111 in 2006 (89 regarding Click for the Climate and 11 regarding Illuminate).

Broadcast coverage

A total of 51 channels/stations covered National Science Week in 2006 and overall broadcast media has increased from 70 pieces of coverage in 2005 to 98 pieces this year.

National broadcasts have remained at the exact same level as last year (9 TV broadcasts and 12 radio broadcasts) so this increase has been entirely down to an increase in regional coverage. Click for the Climate was referred to in 31 (32%) of all of the broadcasts regarding National Science Week.

Webstats

In March 2006, the BA website recorded the highest ever level of visits with 227,065 visits compared to 105,827 in March 2005. This beat the previous high of 143,350 set in January 2006.

During March the most visited webpage was the "Click for the Climate" homepage which had 12,643 visits, compared to the BA homepage which has 12,579 visits and the National Science Week homepage which had 8,729 visits.

Downloads of challenge packs in 2006 also increased massively from 2005. Below is a summary of website visits to each challenge pack between the 1st September and the 31st March, the peak period for challenge pack downloads, for both 2005 and 2006.

Challenge Pack	Online from:	Visits in 2005	Visits in 2006
Colour Chaos	September 2005	N/A	9,522
Exploring Energy	February 2006	N/A	3,913
Einstein's Birthday Party Pack	November 2004	6,120	6,007
Vertically Challenged	November 2004	2,951	4,245
Domestic Science	April 2004	2,109	4,428
Sixty Second Science	April 2004	2,217	5,037
Sounds Like Science	April 2004	1,635	3,732
Total visits to challenge packs		15,032	36,884

Challenge pack visits/downloads rose from 15,032 in 2005 to 36,884 in 2006. Even without the addition of the two new packs, visits would still have risen to 23,449 for packs which have been online for over a year.

The theme of colour was also widely taken up by event organisers with 111 registered events referring to this topic including 20 events specifically called "Colour Chaos".

Public awareness of National Science Week

GfK NOP Consumer carried out a random survey of 1000 adults aged 15 years and over to determine the level of awareness of National Science Week amongst the general public.

Fieldwork was done on the weekend prior to, during and after National Science Week and the questions "Have you heard of National Science Week?" and "When is National Science Week?" were asked.

On the weekend before National Science Week (3rd – 5th March), 30% of respondents had heard of National Science Week and, of these people, 27% knew when it was.

On the weekend during National Science Week (10th – 12th March), 32% of respondents had heard of National Science Week and, of these people, 32% knew when it was.

On the weekend after National Science Week (24th – 26th March), 37% of respondents has heard of National Science Week and, of these people, 40% knew when it was.

For the first time since starting the NOP survey, the general level of awareness and specific knowledge of National Science Week after the project had increased by statistically significant amount compared to before the week. This means that the chances of the increase in awareness being coincidental are extremely low and that the increase should be due to the media coverage and promotional activities undertaken.

Participant's feedback for the BA

We asked organisers and presenters if there was anything that the BA could do to help improve their event or if they had any comments or suggestions as to how we could improve National Science Week as a whole. Below is a summary of the most common comments and suggestions from the respondents:

There is a general feeling amongst organisers and presenters that the level of national and regional publicity surrounding National Science Week is not high enough. Organisers sending off press releases to their local newspapers felt that the journalists should have already known about NSW and be waiting to hear news of what was happening in their local area.

"My local papers were unaware of NSW and they were not ready to cover our event. More publicity needed."

"Local/regional awareness through local press and radio at least one week beforehand!"

"More publicity of events in local area, perhaps in media, local papers, etc."

Many organisers commented that they would like to receive the National Science Week printed programmes earlier.

The dates of National Science Week were questioned by some organisers who felt that March was too cold for outdoor activities and that it was a bad time with respect to school exams.

"National Science Week is at a particularly busy time for our organization is in the last month of the financial year. Some other time of year would be better."

"The Scottish exam is different from yours, and I don't think this is taken into account when organising the dates."

"Don't do it in March - too cold especially for outdoor activities."

Funding and free merchandise to help promote events would be appreciated by participants.

"... financial support - the event cost around £100 to put on - money the department really can't afford."

"...would be good if you could provide funding for freebies, posters etc."

"Limited resources available for science week products in the school budget - we did buy the T-shirts for prizes and sixth form helpers - but did appreciate the free T-shirts and badges in 2005."

A more reliable and flexible online events system would be highly beneficial to organisers.

"I found registering the events via the website fairly difficult - the site crashed several times."

"Registering the event proved problematical and ended up with us not being in the brochure. "

Other comments and suggestions made included having a simpler evaluation procedure for younger attendees; to provide more guidelines and advice for running events; to provide banners to be used at events; to provide Welsh language resources; to post information and resources out to organisers rather than use email and to have leaflets available rather than, or as well as, programmes during the week.

Summary of the impacts of National Science Week 2006

- There has been an increase in the number of registered events from 1,090 to 1,227 (12.5%) since 2005.
- There has been an increase in the number of unregistered events uncovered by the media trawl from 225 to 446 (50%) since 2005.
- There has been an increase in the number of registered organisers from 374 to 484 (29%) since 2005.
- 274 of the organisers in 2006 (57%) had never registered a NSW event before and were therefore presumably new to National Science Week.
- 24% of organisers only ever organise events as part of National Science Week.
- 88% of organisers said that they would run a National Science Week again in the future.
- 60% of organisers said that they were running events “to be part of National Science Week”
- 88% of organisers felt that their events had been a success.
- 39% of National Science Week presenters were employed as scientists.
- 47% of presenters (and 37% of the total number of scientists) had never presented at a National Science Week event before.
- 96% of presenters said that they would definitely or probably consider being involved in other National Science Week events.
- We estimate that over 660,000 attendees took part in a National Science Week event.
- 51% of attendees had never heard of National Science Week before and 72% had never attended a National Science Week event before.
- 43% of attendees had never been to any kind of science event before.
- 80% of attendees said that they would attend another National Science Week in the future.
- Website visits more than doubled in March 2006 compared to 2005.
- The “Click for the Climate” homepage was the most visited page on the BA Website in March.
- Challenge Pack visits more than doubled in 2006 compared to 2005.
- The Challenge Pack theme, Colour, influenced 111 registered events.
- Media coverage of National Science Week rose by 28% in 2006 compared to 2005.
- Public awareness of National Science Week rose from 30% before the week, to 37% after the week.
- Of the people who were aware of National Science Week, awareness of the dates rose from 27% before the week, to 40% after the week.

Recommendations for National Science Week 2007

In addition to the continuation of the recommendations from 2005, there are also a number of extra recommendations that should be put into place for National Science Week 2007 as a result of organiser and staff feedback of events.

- The BA should continue to try and improve the media profile and public awareness of National Science Week through a strong, media friendly, large scale activity. The BA should use the relationship with the Engineering and Technology Board in order to develop and promote this activity.
- The branding of National Science Week events should be reinforced by free resources such as T-shirts and banners at key events which are likely to generate press coverage or attract large numbers of attendees.
- Extra branding guidelines should be provided for organisers.
- Research should be done into the provision of extra Welsh language resources.
- Ethnic diversity amongst organisers and presenters was down in 2006 and further methods of increasing diversity should be researched and put into place.
- A simpler evaluation for schools and younger participants should be put into place to encourage feedback from all sectors.
- Incentives for returning evaluation forms on time should be provided.
- Information packs for organisers to pass onto presenters at their events should be developed. Try to forge bonds directly with presenters so that they feel more involved in the project and can contact the BA office directly if necessary.
- Try to improve the programme distribution channels to ensure swift delivery of programmes. Possible recruitment of multiple mailing houses in different regions.

Did National Science Week meet it's objectives in 2006?

The main objectives of National Science Week are to:

- Engage and inspire adults and young people directly with science, engineering and technology and their implications.
- Provide a platform for individuals and organisations from different fields or sectors to present scientific information to the public in an accessible and non-threatening format.
- Foster and encourage partnerships between the public, policy makers, decision makers and the scientific and business communities, so that they continue to develop innovative ways to promote science, engineering and technology.
- Raise awareness of extraordinary range of scientific activity, research and knowledge throughout the UK.

National Science Week 2006 managed to reach an estimated audience of over 660,000 people of all ages⁴ with a huge variety of events on all topics and fields of science, including the physical sciences, social sciences and engineering.

A mixture of experienced and novice event organisers, presenters and attendees took part in National Science Week, from a range of different backgrounds, and overwhelmingly positive feedback was received by the majority of those involved.

Public awareness of National Science Week, alongside coverage in the press and website visits, have all increased in 2006 helping to raise the profile of the event as a whole and highlighting the range of scientific activity and expertise across the UK.

National Science Week owes its success to the hard work of each of the individual organisers who put on events across the country. As the vast majority of organisers share the aims of the BA, to enthuse and inspire people about science, the overall effect of this has been to create a highly successful week which has hopefully gone a long way to meet its objectives.

⁴ Not including participants in either the Illuminate or Click for the Climate campaign.