

Public Engagement

We discussed what public engagement means, what opportunities exist within and outwith the University, and what support is needed for organising public engagement activities.

The group agreed that while public engagement includes schools outreach, it is more than that. In simple terms, we understand public engagement as:

- telling the world how exciting our research is; and
- getting feedback about our research.

There is a wide range of **activities** that count as public engagement. These include:

- visiting schools and delivering talks/workshops, etc.
- giving talks (e.g. in pubs)
- organising debates
- running citizen science projects
- editing Wikipedia pages
- collaborating with artists to create art based on our research
- engaging with CS teachers to help them deliver the new computing curriculum
- engaging with professional bodies that could be users of our research

There are several **opportunities** available for public engagement. The School Communications team is planning to publish a comprehensive list on its website later on this month. Some examples include:

- Edinburgh International Science Festival. In some cases, scientists are charged for running events, but not necessarily. The University family programme does not charge and it covers the payment for student helpers.
- Midlothian Science Festival. A local festival that reaches out to communities that might not typically visit the Edinburgh Science Festival.
- Explorathon. The celebration of EU Researchers Night in Scotland.
- Café Scientifique. Informal meetings that take place outside a traditional academic context, such as cafes, bars and restaurants. One of the venues in Edinburgh is the Filmhouse bar.
- Leith Labs. Science activities, discussions and busking in a shopping mall (Ocean Terminal). It's a good way to reach out to a diverse audience.
- Ragged University. Scientific talks aimed at very varied community audiences, used to take place in the Counting House, now around Edinburgh.
- Eureka Edinburgh. Topical scientific events in informal settings (Paradise Palms)

- SCI-FUN. It is a travelling science roadshow that visits schools, communities and science festivals. It is run by the University.

Public engagement opportunities are **advertised** on:

- Beltane Public Engagement Network website
- College of Science and Engineering mailing list
- Emails from Informatics Comms Team and on their web
- *proposed*: an Informatics public engagement mailing list

The group felt that further **support** and coaching is needed for those interested in running public engagement activities. Communicating theoretical research and making it relevant can be particularly challenging. Several members of the group mentioned that they struggle to explain to their friends and family what it is that they do. Coaching would be very useful with regards to such challenging content – many University training events focus on style instead.

Some ideas for such support include tailoring one of the existing University public engagement training events to Informatics or have a workshop where a professional science communicator helps participants put together a short, non-academic description of their research.

We also discussed **ideas** for different events that we could run as a School. Some examples include:

- Training our students in public engagement, so they can then run their own activities e.g. in their primary schools at home.
- Piloting public engagement activities with non-academic staff members of the School.
- Informatics Late. Inspired by Museum Lates, we could host an Informatics evening event with music, alcohol, hands-on activities, demos, tours of the Forum, etc.